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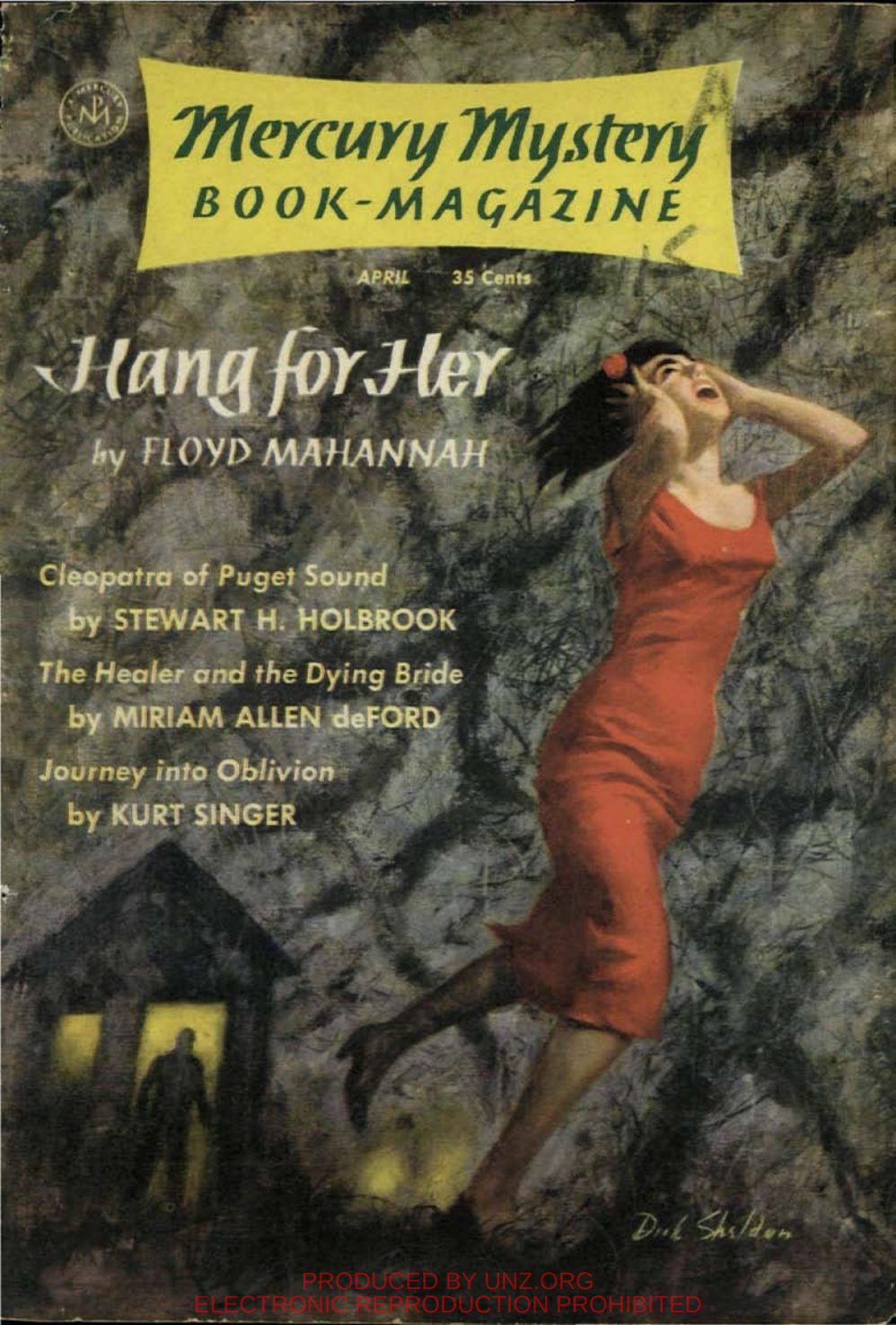

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Mercury Mystery
BOOK-MAGAZINE

HANG FOR HER *by Floyd Mahannah* 3

A New Mystery Novel

Dex Nolan's love for beautiful, treacherous Ivy trapped him into helping her evade the law. And it turned both of them into frightened fugitives from a murder rap — fugitives who couldn't even trust each other . . .

Mystery Puzzle: Ski Lodge Murder *by J. A. Kripper* 100

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EXCITING MYSTERY READING

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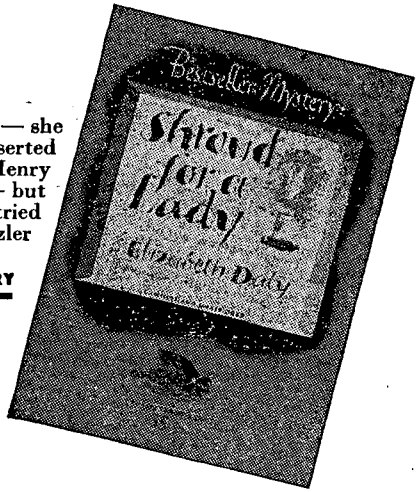
(formerly "The Wrong Way Down")

by Elizabeth Daly



Julia Paxton's murder was a vicious one — she had been pushed off the balcony of a deserted house on Fifth Avenue and killed. Henry Gamadge took her murder personally — but before he could do much about it someone tried to shoot him in the back. ". . . a real puzzler . . ." says the New York *Times*.

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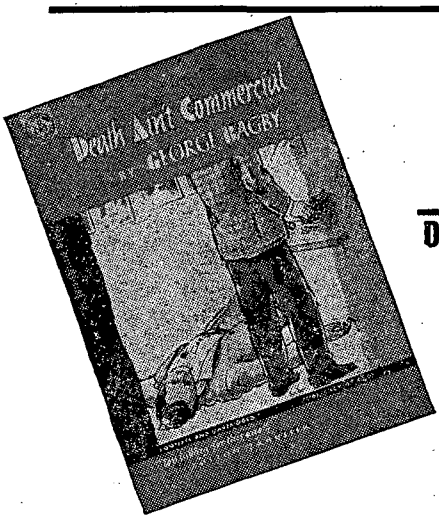

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Floyd Mahannah has been a truck-driver, tool-planner, bookkeeper and stock-clerk. Ten years ago, he decided to become a writer, and three years later he sold his first story to "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." Today, Mr. Mahannah is the successful author of four fine mystery novels, dozens of short stories, and, as a citizen of California, is currently working on an historical novel.

"Hang for Her" is Floyd Mahannah at his best — the gripping story of a treacherous beauty, the men who died for her, and the one man who was strong enough to want to live for her — if he could clear them both of a murder rap . . .

HANG FOR HER

by Floyd Mahannah

CHAPTER ONE

POP HARRINGDON'S OASIS: the sign atop the wooden water tower said. Beneath the sign were a service station, six whitewashed adobe cabins, a few scrubby palo verde trees, a big cottonwood, and that was all.

The big tank truck braked to a stop, and Dex Nolan, suitcase in hand and coat over his arm, stepped down from the high cab.

"Much obliged," he said over his shoulder.

"Forget it."

The driver put the truck back into gear, the big diesel barked, and the heavy rig pulled back onto the highway.

Dex looked at the whitewashed cabin marked OFFICE, and he'd rather take a beating than go in there and break the news to Pop, but it had to be done. He hefted the suitcase and started toward it.

He was a big man, tall and solid through the shoulders. His hair was short and black, and the stubble on his jaw picked up little blue lights in the sun. The gray coat over his arm, like the blue slacks, was good but needed pressing He wore no tie, and his shirtsleeves were rolled up on heavy, muscular arms that were deeply tanned, like his face. Bone-tired, the way he was now, he looked every one of his thirty-two years. And felt them.

Outside the office door, he called, "Pop?"

"Come on in, Dex."

Inside the cabin, Dex paused a moment to let his eyes adjust to the

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dimness. There was no air-conditioning — Pop's arthritis required heat and lots of it — but the dimness gave some illusion of coolness.

Dex could make out Pop Harringdon now: a spare, bent figure in the swivel chair back of the scarred desk, blowing on a cup of coffee.

"Coffee's on the stove," Pop said, in greeting.

"I can use some."

Dex set down his suitcase and coat, went into the kitchen, and came back with a cup of coffee. He sat heavily on the worn leather couch.

The old man waited, blowing on his coffee.

"They got it all, Pop," Dex said at last. "The mine, the machinery, the works. Even my Jeep and prospecting gear."

"Well, it's gone, so to hell with it," Pop said. "Buck up. You'll put together another stake in a year or so. Then you can go back to prospecting."

"Not me. I'm finished."

"Ah, you're just tired. Drink your coffee."

Dex tasted his coffee. It was strong and good. He looked up at Pop, then away at the bare cement floor. He was very fond of this old man; and, worse than the loss of the mine, was the knowledge that Pop's last two thousand dollars had gone with it. Except for the heavily mortgaged Oasis, Pop was as broke as he was.

"I'll pay back your money as fast as I can, Pop."

The old man waved a swollen-knuckled hand, irritably, as if brushing away the money. Dex took another swallow of his coffee; and it was then that his eye fell on the green Cadillac which stood, new and shiny, between the office and the next cabin. "Whose Cadillac?"

Pop slapped the desk suddenly. "I plum forgot. She came to see you."

"She?"

"A mighty pretty gal. Got in yesterday, asking for you. I told her most likely you'd be back today, so she stayed the night. Name's Mrs. Ivy Settlander —" Pop broke off at the look on Dex's face. "What's the matter?"

"I knew her once. A long time ago. She was almost my wife."

"What happened?"

"Winston Settlander had more money."

"Like that, huh?"

"Like that."

"We talked quite a spell last night," Pop said thoughtfully. "Nothing personal, just yarning. I kind of took a shine to her. It ain't just that's she's pretty — but she's got a nice, soft-spoken way about her. Don't smile. You get old like me, and you can sense things about people. I like her."

"So did I. Once."

"And she's in some kind of trouble."

"I suppose you can sense that too?"

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"Nope. I heard her crying over there last night."

"You're mistaken, Pop. That one doesn't know how to cry."

Dex finished the coffee, and stood up. "Well, I've got to get going."

"You'll need some traveling money." Pop reached for his wallet, his crippled hands clumsy.

"No, Pop. I can make it just as fast thumbing."

"Take five bucks to eat on, then." Pop held out the bill. "God damn it, take it. And go over to see that gal before you leave."

Dex hesitated, his face hard to read, then he nodded.

Standing in the hot sunlight, waiting for Ivy to answer his knock. Then there was a sound from inside of the cabin, and the door opened.

And Ivy stood there.

Four years hadn't changed her much. Not at first glance, anyway. Her hair was still the color of dark honey, and she still wore it a little long. Her eyes were as he remembered them — gray with a faint dusting of gold flecks that gave them a smoky look. Her mouth still had its rich curves, and her body its long and lovely shape. She wore a thin, green dress with a white belt and flared skirt; and she looked cool and fresh in this hot morning.

"Hello, Dex." There was uncertainty in her voice.

"Pop said you wanted to see me." Dex's voice was impersonal.

"I — yes." She glanced over her shoulder at the tiny room.

Dex said, "It's cooler over under the cottonwood."

Ivy nodded, stepping out of the cabin. She sat on the bench in the shade of the cottonwood, and she said, "It's good to see you again, Dex. Pop told me about your mine. How did the suit turn out?"

"I lost it."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

Ivy said, "You — you heard about my husband?"

"Paula wrote me that he had been killed."

"Murdered."

"That's what Paula said." Paula was Ivy's best friend. In fact it had been Paula who had introduced them. Dex said, "Have the police solved it yet?"

"No. In — in a way, that's why I'm here," Ivy said.

Dex turned his head and looked at her. He could see that she had changed. Just as pretty, maybe, but in a different way. Some of the softness gone.

"Dex, I'm in trouble."

"That's what Pop said."

"How did he know?"

"He heard you crying last night."

"Oh." Ivy took a deep breath, like a swimmer about to dive in. "Dex, I know I have no right to ask you any favors. Not after what happened four years ago. But I have simply no one else to turn to."

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Dex didn't look at her, nor answer.

"I — I'm at my wits' end. You used to be a policeman. Maybe you'll know how to handle it."

"Handle what?"

"Blackmail. I'm being blackmailed. And I don't know what to do about it."

"Maybe you'd better start at the beginning. Is it hooked up with your husband's murder?"

"Indirectly. My purse was stolen — as it happens, on the same night Winston was killed, although that part of it is pure coincidence. There were some letters in that purse that can cause a terrible lot of trouble."

"For whom?"

"For me and a friend of mine. A man."

A bleakness touched Dex's face. "I see."

Ivy caught the look, and it seemed to touch a spark of anger in her. "It isn't any sordid love triangle, if that's what you're thinking. Nor anything like it. It's simply that this man is big, politically, in San Diego; and those letters — one from him to me, and another I'd written him but not mailed yet — are capable of misinterpretation. If they were made public, there would be a scandal; it could ruin him politically."

"Especially if he has no alibi for the time of your husband's murder."

"He has an alibi. He was in Washington. He still is."

"I see."

"I'm being blackmailed," Ivy said. "I've paid out more than three thousand dollars, and I can't pay much more. Winston died practically broke. There is a hundred thousand dollar insurance policy, but the company keeps stalling off payment. And even when I do get it, it'll just go the way of the three thousand. I don't think the blackmailer ever intends to return the letters."

"He'd be a pretty stupid blackmailer if he did."

"I'm desperate, Dex. I don't dare trust a private detective. Those letters are dynamite. You used to be a policeman. Could you handle that?"

"That would depend."

"I would pay you," Ivy said. "Anything you asked."

Dex seemed to consider that, but when he spoke he said, "When was your husband killed?"

"It was May third. About ten-thirty, the police said."

Dex checked back in his mind. "That would be a Thursday."

"Yes. It was a Thursday night."

Dex thought about that, eyes narrowing. He had been on his way to Los Angeles that night to try to raise money to save his mine.

A movement at the window of the third cabin caught his eye. Whoever was in there was watching them from behind the curtain.

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Dex said, "Do you know who is blackmailing you?"

"Only his name. I've never seen him. I think he lives in San Diego, but I don't know where."

"What's his name?"

"Alford Duquesne. Of course, it could be false."

"And probably is."

Dex Nolan's thoughts were circling. *If you take a hand in this game, you could wind up with the joker. The cops could get mighty interested in an old lover who had no alibi for the night of the murder. On the other hand, there is the money. She's got it to spare. She's got it and can use it. And Pop needs it. Call it a calculated risk and . . .*

Ivy said, "Please, Dex. Please help me."

"I'll want two thousand dollars." He looked at her, and if the size of his demand surprised her, it didn't show in her face. All that showed there was an immense relief.

"Will a check be all right?" There was relief in her voice too.

"Make it payable to W. W. Harringdon."

She reached for her purse; and while she wrote the check, Dex gazed in the direction of the jagged, reddish mountains. He took a pencil and notebook from his pocket. He tore a page from the notebook, and wrote:

I.O.U. $2,000.00
Dex Nolan

Ivy handed him the check. "Careful. It's not dry."

Dex took the check and gave her the sheet from his notebook. "Here."

"What's this?"

"The two thousand is a loan. I'll pay it back when I can."

"I don't understand. I'm willing to pay —"

"Make it fifty dollars a day, and four days in advance. It's steep, but I'll try to earn it. If I can't handle it in four days, we'll call it quits."

Ivy looked at him a moment longer, her forehead creased, then without a word, she took four fifty-dollar bills out of a billfold and handed them to him.

"All right." Dex shoved them into his pants pocket. "We're in business. You get packed up. I want to talk to Pop."

Inside the office, Pop looked at the check on his desk, then up at Dex, and his cool gray eyes were pleased. "You're going to help her, huh?"

"That's what she's paying me for."

"From the size of this check," Pop grinned, "you must aim to be a heap of help."

"I aim to try. And listen, you get over to Tucson for those treatments the doc wants you to take."

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Pop nodded. "She in bad trouble?"
"Bad enough."
"A nice girl like her."
"Yes," Dex said drily. "A nice girl like her."

CHAPTER TWO

THEY DROVE ACROSS the Colorado River into California, were checked through the agricultural inspection station; and when they were rolling again, Dex said, "All right, let's have it. From the night your husband was killed. Or before, if you think it's important."

Ivy was silent a moment, then she said, "Well, we were invited to this party at Elmo Farrity's place —"

"Elmo Farrity. I've heard the name. Who is he?"

"A friend. He used to live in San Francisco —"

"Now I remember. He used to be in the rackets up there. Race wire. Some said dope and women. As I recall, he even bucked the syndicate for a while, then he got out. Nice friends you have."

"It wasn't that way at all. There was some trouble in San Francisco, but Elmo said —"

"Never mind. Go on about your husband."

"Well, he had a business appointment in San Diego he had to keep before he went to the party, so he told Ansel McLeen and me — Ansel is another friend — to go on ahead to the party, and he'd show up later. We went to the party, but my husband never did get there. I phoned the house about eleven but got no answer. I left the party about midnight. Alone."

"What became of Ansel McLeen?"

"He was the reason I left. He got drunk and out of line — way out — and I walked out on him. I was upset, I didn't go home, I drove around in my car for a while. Then I ran out of gas. It was in the outskirts of El Cajon not far from a tavern called Rafe's Joint. I walked to the tavern to phone, but the phone was busy, so I sat in a booth and had a drink while I waited. Two drinks in fact, then things got all blurry and I passed out. I woke up in a hospital. They told me I'd been drugged, and my purse stolen."

"Who took you to the hospital?" Dex was watching a car in the rear view mirror.

"The proprietor, a man named Rafe Ranick."

"Who fed you the Mickey?"

"Well, there was a woman who sat down at the table while I was there. She tried to strike up a conversation, but I gave her the brush-off. When

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the phone was clear, I called the garage, then went back to the table and finished my drink."

"In other words, she could have spiked it." Dex slowed the Cadillac to forty-five. The car behind did the same, stayed about a quarter of a mile back. "What did the woman look like?"

"About my height. Ten pounds heavier, perhaps five years older. Flashy but not pretty. She wore a shiny blue dress, quite simple, cut deeply in front. Her breasts were large but shapely. Her hair was red, probably hennaed. That's about all I remember. Oh, yes, and her voice was husky, sort of hoarse. She said her name was Jennie."

Dex put the Cadillac up to seventy, saw that the following car did the same. "What does the purse look like?"

"A drawstring bag of nylon mesh with my initials in large gold letters."

"This Alford Duquesne — how did he get into the picture?"

"I don't know. The first two blackmail notes were printed with green ink, and said to wrap a thousand dollars cash in newspaper and drop it into a specified trash can in Balboa Park late at night. Then came this third note, saying to mail a check for a thousand dollars to Alford Duquesne, General Delivery, San Diego."

Dex turned an incredulous look on her. "He asked for a check?"

"Yes."

"Was it cashed?"

"Yes. I checked with the bank."

Dex shook his head. He glanced at the car in his rear view mirror, and he said, "Exactly how was your husband killed?"

"He was shot to death in the library of our house in La Jolla. His wallet and watch and the gun he kept in his desk were all missing. The police theorized he must have surprised a burglar."

Dex thought about that, then said abruptly, "Were you and Settlander on good terms?"

"As it happens, Winston and I had sort of drifted apart. We hadn't been very close for a long time" — she broke off, turning to look at Dex.

"I see. Settlander was in the importing business, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"And business was poor — you said he was almost broke."

"That was because he'd been plunging heavily on oil stocks. As a matter of fact, I think business was pretty good."

"What did he import mostly?"

"Things from Mexico. Sea food from the gulf by air, tomatoes and out of season vegetables through Nogales by rail, a lot of other things."

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They were wheeling through the sand dunes not far from the All American Canal which carries water from the Colorado into Imperial Valley. The road wound and dipped through the great rolling hills of sand without even a blade of grass growing in them. Dex rounded a big dune, spotted a wide place on the road, and pulled to a stop.

Ivy looked at him. "Is something wrong?"

"We've got a tail."

Ivy drew in her breath sharply. "Who?"

"That's what we're going to find out."

Seconds later a dusty black Ford rounded a turn. The driver was swarthy, had a big mop of black hair, and looked a little startled as he passed them.

"Know him?" Dex asked.

Ivy looked a little startled herself. "I think I do. I think he works for Elmo Farrity."

Dex stepped on the gas, and the Cadillac rolled back on the highway.

Ivy said, "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing. It's a free highway."

"Maybe you were mistaken about him following us."

"We'll soon know." A few miles later they passed through a flat area thickly grown in greasewood, and a few miles later Dex glanced in the mirror again. "There he is. What's his name?"

"Marty something-or-other. Can't we shake him off?"

"What for? His boss is a friend of yours, isn't he?"

Ivy gave him an odd look, but she didn't say anything more. She looked around from time to time, but finally she gave that up too. She settled her head on the back of the seat, and dozed off.

It was three o'clock when they pulled into San Diego, and the swarthy man's Ford was still in their rear-view mirror. Ivy directed the way around Mission Bay, through Pacific Beach to her home in La Jolla.

It was on a cliff with the blue Pacific pounding at the foot of it. About forty thousand dollars worth of buff fieldstone and glass; hibiscus, cypress, and oleander growing around it. A gray Chrysler was parked in the driveway, so Dex stopped at the curb.

Ivy said, "You want to come in?"

"No, I'll get on with the job. It'd help if I could use this car."

"Of course."

A tall man in a light tan suit had gotten out of the Chrysler, and now he lifted a hand to wave at Ivy.

Dex said, "Who's that?"

"Elmo Farrity." Ivy waved back.

Dex looked at him, a tall man, thin to the point of gauntness, and even at that distance he could see a resemblance to Abraham Lincoln in the gaunt, rough-hewn features.

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Ivy opened the door, then turned to put a hand on Dex's arm. "Dex," she said earnestly, "please find that purse. You — you'll never know how much depends on it."

"I'll do my best," he said.

And miles away, headed out the Alvarado Freeway toward El Cajon, he could still feel the touch of her hand on his arm.

Do a quick job, he thought. And get out of here.

CHAPTER THREE

The tavern, Rafe's Joint, was a pretty seedy setup. Two sailors were at the bar fueling up for what looked like the third day of a speed run; and a hawk-faced blonde was giving them the eye over a shot of straight whiskey. Dex sat at one end of the bar, away from the others; and the bartender, a plump little Irish-looking character, came his way.

"Howdy. What'll it be?"

"Draught beer. Have one with me."

"Thanks."

Dex looked around the place, and when the beer was set in front of him, he said, "Well, the joint hasn't changed much."

"You been away?"

"For quite a while. You know, I had some good times here. Say," Dex said, "does Jennie still hang out here?"

"Jennie who?"

"I forget her last name. Red-haired gal." Dex sketched a figure in the air with his hands. "Stacked. Especially in front. Seen her around lately?"

"Nope. I'm new here."

Well, it had been a clumsy way to go at it anyway. Dex tasted his beer. "When do the other bartenders come on?"

"Greco comes on at seven. You see, after Alf quit last week they moved Greco up to nights. Maybe Greco would know her."

"Alf?" Dex asked. "What's his last name?"

"Duquesne. Alford Duquesne. Used to be an actor in the old days. At least that's what he claims."

Surprise blanked Dex's face momentarily. Alford Duquesne, the blackmailer who demanded payment by check. And Dex had turned him up as easily as that. It was hard to believe.

"Listen," Dex said, "where does this Alf Duquesne live?"

"Search me."

"Who would know where he lives?"

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"The boss, I reckon. Rafe Ranick."

"Where is he?"

"He don't show until around seven. But he lives down the road about a mile. There's a sign on his house — Rafe's Rancho. You can't miss it."

"Thanks."

Rafe's Rancho was a low ranch-style house, painted yellow with blue shutters. After Dex put it to the Filipino house boy strongly enough, he went inside to wake Rafe Ranick, while Dex waited in the patio.

Presently Ranick came out onto the patio. He was bald, heavy bellied, and needed a shave. "More police, huh?"

Dex shook his head.

"A private dick?"

"Something like that. Anyway, I'd like to ask a few questions."

"Such as?"

"Do you know a woman named Jennie?"

"Jennie? I know at least three broads named Jennie. So what?"

"This one is past thirty, height five-six, weight one thirty, dark red hair, a busty dame with a hoarse voice. She was in your joint that night wearing a blue silk dress cut down to here."

"Nah. I never saw her." But something had changed in the round face. "Now beat it, peeper. I need some more sleep."

"Where can I find your bartender, Alf Duquesne?"

A muscle jumped momentarily in the fat face, but nothing else changed there. "That drunk don't work for me no more."

"Where does he live?"

Ranick waved an impatient arm. "Under some rock. I never did know."

"I see. You sent the government his social security, the state his unemployment insurance, he's covered by liability insurance, you probably had him bonded — but you don't know his address."

"Ah, he moved around until he drove me crazy. I finally just put down his address as the Joint."

"Thanks."

A stop at the Bartender's Local turned up Alford Duquesne's address as a seedy apartment house on Lower Tenth Street. And he was there. Dex could hear him snoring through the thin door.

Dex knocked on the door until a door down the hall labelled MANAGER opened and an anemic, gray-haired old lady said, "For Heaven's sake, Mister, lay off."

"Alford Duquesne live here?" Dex's voice was brusque.

"Sure. What about it?"

"I want to see him. Official business."

The old woman looked down the hall. "Here comes his wife."

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Dex Nolan turned around, and there was a woman walking up the hall carrying a sack of groceries. Not a woman, really, just a girl, barely into her twenties. She was Mexican, next to being pretty and next to being fat. She was wearing too much makeup, her green blouse was too tight, and the red skirt too short; but even at first glance, there was something oddly appealing about her. Perhaps it was the large, soft eyes; and something oddly innocent about her face.

"You got trouble, Zona," the old lady said. "The law."

Zona's face turned still and scared.

"I want to talk to your husband," Dex said, still a cop and still tough.

"All — all right." Zona fumbled at opening the door, got it open. "He's asleep."

Inside, Dex looked around him. It was a poor setup. In the bedroom Alford Duquesne was asleep on a brass bedstead. Beside the bed was a mop bucket with a few inches of water and an empty champagne bottle in it. Another empty bottle lay at the foot of the bed.

Alf looked to be in his fifties; and he might have been good looking in his younger days, but there wasn't much left now in his raddled face.

"Alf." Joe shook him, and he didn't even grunt.

"Please," the girl named Zona asked, "has he done something wrong?"

"Wake up, Alf." Dex slapped him, not hard, and he might as well have been slapping a post. His breath was a full hundred proof. "How long has he been like this?"

"Five or six days, off and on."

"Where did he get all the money?"

"In the mail at the post office."

"Who sent it?"

"I don't know. He said he inherited it. He said we were going to Hollywood and both be movie stars."

"You believe that?"

"No." She looked at Alf and her eyes were sad. "I could not be a movie star. He said it to please me. He is a good man."

"Did he mention a woman named Jennie?"

"No." Without hesitation.

"How long have you been married?"

"Almost two years. Please, he is a good man. He has done nothing wrong."

Dex turned Alf over, and pulled the billfold from his back pocket. There was five hundred and sixty dollars in fifties and twenties. There was a union card, a couple of photographs — faded shots of him in costumes — the calling cards of a theatrical agent, a hairdresser and a masseur. And that was all.

Dex bounded Alf's head back and forth in his hands. He slapped him, not gently. "Snap out of it, Alf."

"Please don't hit him."

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"Just a few light slaps," Dex told her.

"Please. *Please!*" Zona sounded half hysterical.

Dex pulled his ears, the way you do a punchy fighter, and the mumbling was louder. Dex said, "Come on, boy," and slapped him twice more. Then the girl was on his back like a wildcat. Dex pushed her away, and he had a couple of burning streaks on his cheek where her nails had caught him.

"*You let him alone!*" She screamed it for the neighbors to hear.

"Look, Mrs —"

"*You get out of here!*"

That's when the door popped open, and the old landlady yelled, "What's going on in here?"

"Nothing," Dex said.

"*You let him alone!*" The girl screeched again. "*You stop beating him up!*"

"Stay here, Zona!" the old lady yelled. "I'll report him to headquarters!"

It was time to back down, and fast. Dex yelled, "All right. All right," above the clamor, and the yelling stopped. The old lady stayed in the doorway, and Zona stood trying to control her sobs. "All right," Dex said a third time. "If you're going to make such a fuss about it, we'll just let him sleep it off, then I'll talk to him."

"Listen, Mister," the old landlady said, "you never did show me no badge. Are you really a cop?"

"I'll be back," Dex said, turning and walking out of the apartment.

With the girl Zona so worried about where Alf got the money, there wasn't much chance she'd take this incident to the police. Not until Alf woke up, anyway; and he sure wouldn't want any cops.

Dex walked to the car, got in, drove it around the block, and parked again half a block from the apartment house on the opposite side of the street. He had some thinking to do — four hours worth — while he waited down the street from Duquesne's apartment. The sun went down, lights went on in the neighborhood; and finally Alford and Zona Duquesne came down the steps of the apartment house.

An old Packard convertible, very shiny and very yellow, was parked at the curb; and they got into it.

Zona got the motor started, revved it up, took a good grip on the steering wheel, and let out the clutch. The yellow car jumped like an old horse cut with the whip.

Dex Nolan started his car, and followed in their smoke screen.

The yellow car cut over to Highway 101 and turned south on it, toward Mexico. Then instead of going on toward the border, the yellow car cut off the highway in the direction of Imperial Beach; and by the time they got to that town, the fog was thick as cotton. You could see across the street, and that was about all. Dex cut his lights entirely, and closed up until he was practically riding their tail lights.

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For a time the yellow car circled, like it might be lost, but it finally stopped in front of an isolated cottage where lights burned behind drawn blinds. Dex turned on his own lights, and drove on past, stopping a couple of hundred feet further on. He cut the lights and engine, and walked back on the opposite side of the street.

He stood in the denser darkness under an acacia tree, condensed fog dripping down on him from the branches, and he could barely see across the street to the house. He could see Zona's silhouette against the lighted windows, but Alf was gone.

He stood there a good twenty minutes, and nothing happened. Zona stayed in the car. Alf stayed in the house — if that's where he was. No shadows moved against the drawn blinds.

Finally Zona got out of the car, went to the house, and punched the doorbell. Nobody answered it. She appeared to knock on the door, and still nobody answered. She opened the door, and went in, closing it after her.

It couldn't have been more than a couple minutes before the door opened again, and Zona came out; and now she was almost running. She stumbled, almost fell on the front walk, then scrambled into the big yellow car; and above the sound of the surf Dex could hear her sobbing in a low, desperate way that raised the hair on the back of his neck. She got the car started, clashed the gears, and drove away.

Dex hesitated, then crossed the street, and climbed the steps to the front porch. The door was standing open, but Dex rapped on it. "Anybody home?"

There was only the sound of the surf back of the house.

Dex stepped into a poorly lighted entry hall. He turned toward a door where the light was coming from. He stood in that doorway, his eyes scanning the room, coming to a sudden stop on what lay sprawled on the floor near the sofa; and the coldness inside him seemed to freeze up solid. For about ten seconds he couldn't have moved if he'd wanted to.

Alford Duquesne was here, all right. But he wouldn't be answering any questions, because he was dead.

Then the frozen moment passed, and Dex's mind was suddenly boiling with the implications of this killing. Many witnesses — the bartender, Rafe Ranick, the people at the union office, the landlady, Zona — would testify that Dex had been on Duquesne's trail. Zona and the landlady would swear Dex had tried to beat him up. To this the police would add the fact Dex and Ivy had once been lovers — still were, the way the cops would figure — plus the fact Duquesne had been blackmailing Ivy, then tie in the fact Dex had no alibi for either the Settlander murder or this one; and you couldn't blame the cops for concluding they had a brand new suspect for two murders. And his name was Dex Nolan.

Get out of here, he thought. *Fast!*

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CHAPTER FOUR

BUT EVEN AS HE TURNED away, Dex Nolan changed his mind about running. He wanted to know some things first.

Walking into the room, he knelt and looked closely at the body. Alford Duquesne lay sprawled on his stomach, his face toward the door. Everything about him — his legs, arms, face, even his fingers — was twisted in agony. His lips were blue, and his eyes stared madly. He had vomited on the rug, and his death struggle had been made in the mess of it.

He'd been poisoned. Cyanide, by the look of him. Nothing else would have worked so fast he couldn't have staggered to the door and called for help.

Dex, his face a little gray under the tan, stood up and looked around the room. Except for what lay on the floor, it was neat and clean enough; but it had an unlived-in look.

On a table beside the sofa was an uncorked bottle of Scotch whiskey, nearly full. There was an empty glass beside it, and a second glass lay on the floor near the body.

Not touching the bottle, Dex sniffed at the open neck. There was the smoky fragrance of good Scotch, and a faint odor of bitter almonds. Cyanide. Alf, drunk as he already was, wouldn't have noticed it.

Dex stood looking down at the body, his face grim. As a blackmailer, Alford Duquesne had been a washout; but he'd sure landed Ivy in a mess. She'd checked at the bank to see if a check made to this guy had been cashed; and chances were the bank would remember it. She was in it almost as deeply as Dex was, especially if she didn't have an alibi. And, thinking of how big a mess it might turn out to be, Dex felt a little sick.

There was nothing left to do now but call the police. There was no phone in the house, so Dex left, closing the front door behind him, using his handkerchief over the doorknob. He walked through the clammy fog toward his car; and, beside it, collided with a man who had appeared, walking, in the thick mist.

"Sorry, friend." Dex steadied the man with a hand on his arm.

"Sure is thick, isn't it?" He was an old man by the sound of his voice, and the spindly arm Dex held. "Got a match?"

"Sure." Dex gave him the match, the old man struck it, and too late Dex turned away. The old man got a good look at his face in the light.

Then the old man lit his pipe, said, "Much obliged," and walked away in the fog.

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Dex started the car, and creeping along in the fog, had the sudden, strong impulse just to run and keep on running. He had to call the cops, but not just yet. When he went to the cops, Ivy was going with him.

At the first drugstore he passed, he stopped and phoned her house. There was no answer. What did he do now? Just wait until she got home. That might take hours.

Then he remembered that he had one friend in this town, Paula Kenzie, who was also Ivy's best friend. And Paula might even be able to furnish him the answers to some of the questions that were rising in his mind.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FOG had not reached San Diego yet. The bright moon threw Dex Nolan's shadow ahead of him as he crossed the lawn to the small house where Paula Kenzie lived. It was a neat little house, white stucco with yellow shutters. Before Ivy's marriage to Settlander, she and Paula had shared this house; and since that time Paula had lived in it alone. In this house Dex had first met Ivy.

Dex rang the bell, and looked up and down the quiet street.

A light went on overhead, the door opened and Paula's startled voice said, "Dex!"

"Hello, Paula."

"What are you doing in San Diego?"

"That's a long story."

"Well, don't stand out there. Come on in." She squeezed his arm as he came in. "It's good to see you." She started to close the door behind him, then she looked toward the street and stopped. "Is that Ivy's Cadillac out there?"

"Yes. She loaned it to me."

"Where's Ivy?"

"I don't know."

For some reason Paula stood a moment longer looking at the Cadillac. She was tall for a woman, almost as tall as Dex; and not even her starched nurse's uniform could hide the fine figure inside it: the rich fullness of her breasts, the slender waist and long clean-lined legs that tapered to fine ankles.

Paula closed the door and turned to look at Dex.

The smile had faded from her face, and without it she looked tired and worried. It was a homely face, almost ugly, the nose long, the chin sharp — a face that was oddly misshapen in its bone structure. But her hair was

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black and shining above a smoothly tanned brow. Her eyes, the same shade of cool gray as Dex's, were usually clear and lively, but tonight they looked tired like the rest of her face. A lot of men whistled at Paula's figure, and some even whistled again, when they saw her face, but it was a different kind of whistle. Her and Dex's friendship dated back to the war, and for at least two years now he'd known she was in love with him.

Paula said, "Are you and Ivy — together again?"

"No. Nothing like that. Some business I'm taking care of for her."

"Business?"

"Yes." Dex let it go at that. "Is that coffee I smell?"

"Sit down. I'll get it." She stood a second longer, some of the worry still in her face, then she turned toward the kitchen. Dex watched her long graceful figure out of sight, then he sat down, rubbing the back of his neck with a hand.

He looked around the familiar living room; and although there were no marks of Ivy left in it, the memories of four years ago were strong in him.

Then he glanced at the bookshelves to one side, with their neatly aligned books, and finally at the coffee table in front of him where two more books lay, one of them open and face down. He read the title: New Techniques in Plastic Surgery. The book beside it was titled Bone Surgery.

Paula came back with coffee and cups on a tray. "I forgot to ask. How is Pop?"

"About the same. He's going to Tucson for some treatments."

"Then you won the suit?" She looked pleased.

"Nothing like it."

"You lost?"

"Everything."

"Oh, Dex!"

Dex shrugged. He took the coffee and tasted it. She made it black and strong the way he liked it.

Paula said, "We'll skip the part about it being none of my business, and I'll just be plain nosey. What is this business you're handling for Ivy?"

Dex shook his head, not answering.

"It's not idle curiosity, Dex. Ivy is in trouble."

"I know."

"She's in trouble and she's scared. I know the signs. It takes a lot to scare Ivy, but this time she's really scared. Are you mixed up in it?"

"Yes."

The cup trembled, a few drops spilled on her uniform, but she ignored them. "Since when?"

"Today."

"What happened today?"

"I can't tell you, Paula. I only came here to ask you a few questions."

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"About what?"

"Do you know Elmo Farrity?"

"Yes. I met him a few times at Ivy's house. I believe he and Winston Settlander had some business dealings, but I can't tell you about them."

"Is Elmo Farrity mixed up in the politics of this town?"

"Not that I ever heard. Doesn't he have some sort of a shady past in the northern part of the state?"

"Quite shady. What else do you know about him?"

"Well," Paula hesitated. "He asked Ivy to marry him a few days ago."

Dex's eyes didn't lift from his cup. "What did Ivy say to that?"

"She said she turned him down, but that doesn't mean she will the next time he asks."

"Why do you say that?"

"Elmo Farrity is a very rich man" — Paula let the sentence hang there. She tasted her coffee, and she said, "The rumor around town is that Settlander owed him money. Quite a lot."

"Did you ever ask Ivy about that?"

"No."

Thoughtfully Dex swirled the coffee in his cup. "Is it true that Ivy is mixed up with some big politician in San Diego?"

"Not so far as I know. And I'd probably know." Paula leaned forward earnestly. "Dex, you can trust me. If you'd give me more to go on, I could be a lot more help to you."

Dex finished his coffee in one quick gulp and set the cup and saucer on the coffee table. He said, "Did you ever hear of a bartender named Alford Duquesne?"

"No. Who is he?"

"Did you ever hear of a woman named Jennie? A red-haired woman with a big bust and a hoarse voice."

"No."

"Or a tavernkeeper named Rafe Ranick?"

"Wasn't Ivy drugged in his tavern?"

"Do you know anything else about him? Any connection with Elmo Farrity or anyone else you know?"

Paula shook her head. Finally she said in a low voice, "Are you kidding yourself — about you and Ivy?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean" — there was a catch in her voice — "are you still in love with her?"

"No." The word was flat and harsh.

She nodded but the expression on her face was unconvinced. Abruptly she said, "Do you have an alibi for the night Winston Settlander was killed?"

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"No. I was driving to L. A. Alone."

"Then you're a fool!" Her voice was strained.

Dex looked up startled.

"Don't you see how it looks if you hook up with Ivy again right after her husband's murder? Don't you see how the police will construe that?"

"It was a chance I had to take," Dex said, not meeting her angry eyes. "I needed the dough."

"Liar! You still love her. You know what she is, but you love her anyway. She dumped you once for a man with money. Now he's dead, she's scared to death of something — don't ask me what, she won't tell me — but can't you see you might wind up taking the rap for her? Dex —"

She broke off, breathing hard. She put her cup and saucer on the coffee table, and her hands were shaking. She took a deep breath, then another and she said in a low voice, "I'm sorry."

"Forget it."

"And to think," Paula said, almost to herself, "that it was I who brought you two together."

Dex didn't look up.

"I never dreamed she'd fall for a guy with as little money as you. Oh, she fell for you all right. You knocked her for a loop."

Dex tightened his fist then relaxed it.

"And that scared her," Paula said. "Ivy had never fallen for a man before. She didn't know it could happen. Not to her. Ever since she was old enough to know what marriage was all about, Ivy had her mind made up that she was going to marry money. Big money. Then along you came and knocked the props right out from under her. That's why — as soon as the Army shipped you back out, and she had time to think without you there to confuse her — she married money. Fast."

"This isn't getting us anywhere."

"I know. It's none of my business. That's why I've never talked to you this way before. I thought of Ivy as my friend, but I think we've come to the end of that. I've known Ivy since grammar school. It was one of those beauty and the beast friendships — the homeliest kid in school teaming up with the prettiest. I guess Ivy liked the contrast. With me, I think it was just a hunger to be around something beautiful." Paula smiled wryly. "As if some of it might be reflected onto me. You don't know what it's like, Dex, being as ugly as I am."

"I don't see you that way."

"Let me finish. Then I'll butt out. I know Ivy. In some ways I know her perhaps better than she knows herself. And one thing I can tell you. Dex, no matter how Ivy feels, emotionally, about anything or anybody, when the chips are down only one person counts — Ivy. Her welfare. Right now she's in trouble, bad trouble. And I can tell you for a certainty: *whether she loves*

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you or not, if she sees a chance to get out — even at your expense — she'll take it."

Dex's fist tightened again on his thigh, but he didn't look up nor speak.

"Remember what I say, Dex. Be careful. And don't go out on any limb for her."

"I may have to do that. Or sink her."

"Then sink her," Paula said, a strange passion in her voice. "Dump her."

CHAPTER SIX

IVY SETTLANDER'S HOUSE in La Jolla was dark when Dex Nolan got there. He'd called from Paula's place, and gotten no answer; and he was here now on the off chance that she had switched off her phone and gone to bed. He pushed the bell now and waited.

There was no answer, and Dex rang the bell again.

Then he heard a footstep on the driveway behind him, and he turned. It was a man, and even by moonlight, Dex recognized the swarthy man with the bushy hair who had followed them from Pop's Oasis. Marty, she had called him.

"Dex Nolan?" His voice was quiet, mild.

"Yes."

"Elmo Farrity wants to see you."

"Why?"

"He doesn't tell me these things. Shall we go?" Marty caught Dex's look at the door, and he added, "She isn't home."

"Where is she?"

"Out on the town. With a character named Ansel McLeen."

"Who is he?"

"Look," Marty sighed. "We could spend the evening playing question and answer, but I think you'd be a lot more interested in what Elmo Farrity has to say."

Dex hesitated. He had his own reason for wanting to talk to Farrity. A suspicion had been kicking around in his head ever since he'd first talked to Ivy this morning. Several times during the day he had pulled it out to look at it; and at first it had seemed crazy, but the more he learned about this mess, the saner his suspicion looked. And the bigger the sucker it made out of him.

Abruptly, Dex said, "All right. You lead the way, and I'll follow in my car."

It was a short while later that Marty led him into Elmo Farrity's study.

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"I'm glad you could make it." His voice had a faint, not unpleasant mid-west twang. "Sit down. I'll be with you in a second."

Farrity's smile at Dex was pleasant. "This Settlander mess and the interruptions of the police have put me way behind on my business affairs. Would you care for a drink, Nolan?"

"No thanks."

"Then we can get down to business. What about this woman named Jennie?"

So that was it. Dex rapidly reviewed the people he'd talked to about Jennie. It could have been any one of them, but Dex's choice was Ranick.

Dex said, "What about her?"

"You've been looking for her. Why?"

"My business," Dex said shortly.

"Ivy's, you mean. She hired you?" The faintest trace of malice cracked the Lincolnesque façade. "Or is it all for the sake of an old love?"

Dex's eyes narrowed, but he didn't answer.

"All right," Farrity said, "we'll just say you're working for her. Now who is this woman named Jennie?"

Dex took out a cigarette and lit it. "Ivy was at your party the night her husband was killed. Does she really have an alibi, or are you just giving her one?"

"She has an alibi. Now suppose you answer my question."

"How much money did Settlander owe you?"

"Quite a lot," Farrity said quietly. "And you still haven't answered my question."

"I don't intend to."

"I see. Is it a question of money?"

"No."

"All for the love of Ivy, huh?"

Dex's solid-jawed face was almost stolid. Only the narrowed eyes showed any expression, as he asked, "Could Settlander have been afraid that if he couldn't pay the money he owed you, that you would — shall we say — liquidate him?"

That was one question too many, and Dex knew it the instant he asked it.

He said in a cold, quiet voice that had nothing to do with Lincoln: "You like to eat with your own teeth, don't you, Nolan?"

Dex's eyes had a chilly quality of their own. "It's a habit I have."

"Then don't say things like that to me."

Dex smoked his cigarette without comment.

"Now once more," Farrity said. "Who is Jennie?"

That was enough of questions and answers. Dex had found out the one thing he wanted to know. Now he stood up. "Good night, Farrity."

Dex turned away, walked through the door.

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"*Nolan!*" Farrity's voice was like the crack of a whip.

Dex stopped in his tracks, but not because of the whiplash voice behind him. Another man had appeared in the doorway ahead of him. He was at least six and a half feet tall, and he was built like a big butterball. His hair was white-blonde, his face pink, and his head so round that the small features looked like something painted on a casaba melon. He looked at Dex and he looked at Farrity; and for some reason, his small rosebud mouth shaped a happy smile.

Dex turned to face Farrity. Dex picked up a heavy, iron candlestick. For ten seconds nobody said a word, and Dex could feel his heart start to beat faster; but his face remained hard and expressionless.

Then Farrity seemed to make a decision. Some of the cold light went out of his eyes, his lips shaped a faint smile, and he looked like Lincoln again.

"It's all right, Mace," he told the butterball. Then to Dex, "Good night Nolan," and he went back the way he came.

Dex drove to the Settlander house again, and it was still dark. Dex didn't stop.

He drove over to Highway 101 where it comes out of Rose Canyon; he stopped at the first motel he came to, and he registered as James Carter of San Francisco.

The body over in Imperial Beach had kept this long; it'd keep another twelve hours. Tomorrow Dex might be in jail, but tonight he'd get some rest.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DEX NOLAN WOKE UP at nine the next morning, and he lay in bed listening to the news on the radio. There was no mention of Alford Duquesne's murder, so evidently the body hadn't been found yet.

Finally he got up, shaved glumly, dressed, and drove over to La Jolla, stopping on the way at a drive-in to have breakfast.

At the Settlander house he parked the car in the driveway, walked up the flagstones to the house. He rang the bell, and a middle-aged woman wearing an apron answered the door.

"Is Mrs. Settlander at home?"

"Yes, sir. She's down on the beach."

"Back of the house, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. There are steps down the cliff."

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Ivy was lying face down on the striped blanket, her head turned away from him so that she couldn't see him coming. She wore a skimpy yellow swim-suit with no straps; and her shining blonde hair was fanned out on the blanket. Dex stood a moment looking down at the slim and lovely shape of her.

Ivy turned over, shading her eyes with a hand. "Oh, hello."

"Hello." Ivy sat up, and she was smiling, but it was an unsure smile.

"Any luck, Dex?"

Dex shook his head, looking away from the smile.

He was abrupt. "What kind of a man was Winston Settlander?"

She didn't answer until Dex turned his head and looked at her. Her smile was gone. "He was good to me, if that's what you mean."

"Why didn't you love him any more?"

"I never did love him. I tried to. I wanted to. But I couldn't."

"Why not?"

Her gaze dropped to the level of his chin. "I don't know. Perhaps it was because I married him for his money."

"How did he feel about the arrangement?"

"He knew why I married him. Before we were married. He wanted to marry me anyway."

Dex picked up a handful of sand, let it trickle through big fingers. His voice was matter-of-fact: "Did he tell you he was deep in debt?"

"Yes."

"And to whom?"

"No. But he did act as if he were — well, frightened of something."

"Elmo Farrity?"

Dex was watching her face, and it showed surprise.

Dex said, "You stayed married for his money. What did Settlander stay married for?"

"He didn't like me, but he loved me. He didn't want to, especially toward the last. But he did. Can you understand that?"

Ivy went on, "He knew I didn't love him, and he hated that part of it. Sometimes he wouldn't come near me for weeks. Then he'd come back. He was good to me. Better than I deserved."

"A hundred thousand dollars better."

"Why are you asking all these questions, Dex?"

Not looking at her face, he said in a steady voice, "You lied to me about what was in that purse."

"*Then you've found it!*"

"No."

"Then how did you know —" she left the sentence hanging there.

"In that purse," Dex said, "was the gun your husband killed himself with. And the suicide note."

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He could hear the sharp intake of her breath, but she didn't say a word.

"Your husband was jammed. Badly jammed with a very tough guy. He was crazy in love with a woman who only married him for his money. And, now that he was broke, she was a cinch to leave him. He was broke, worried sick, he had no future with you, he was on a spot with Elmo Farrity. He wrote a note, put the gun to his forehead, and pulled the trigger."

Ivy didn't make a sound.

Still not looking at her, Dex said, "You knew about the hundred thousand dollar insurance policy, and you knew it didn't pay off for suicide. Probably he mentioned it in the note. For by committing suicide instead of perhaps waiting for Farrity to kill him, he was cheating you out of all that money. I think he was finally done loving you, Ivy."

Ivy made a choked sound, but she didn't speak.

"The only way you could get the money now was to turn a suicide into burglary and murder. You put the gun and note in your purse, mussed the place up a little, then went back to the party. Maybe it was a big party and kind of rowdy — anyway, you hadn't been missed. And a lot of your friends had the impression you'd been there all the time."

"Dex —"

"Let me finish. After the party you found you couldn't go home to face what was waiting for you there. You weren't even sure you could act right for the police. You drove around in your car, and you ran out of gas. You went in Rafe's Joint to phone. You were fed a Mickey, and your purse was stolen. Then the blackmail started. Isn't that right?"

Ivy didn't answer.

Dex's face had hardened while he talked, and now, still not looking at her, he said, "You were in a hinge. On one hand was the law and the insurance company. Not only would the cops land on you for tampering with evidence, but the insurance company would prosecute — they have to make examples of people like you, so the other chiselers won't get any big ideas — they'd send you to prison, and no two ways about it. On the other hand was the blackmail. In time they'd drain away the whole hundred grand unless they could be stopped. You decided I was your best bet. You figured you could handle me — that if I got the purse back and discovered what was really in it, I'd still give you a break."

Ivy's face was pale under the tan, and it had a pinched look. "What — what are you going to do about it, Dex?"

"I don't know."

"Is it true that I could be sent to prison?"

"If you accept the insurance money."

"It was paid. Yesterday. I put it in the bank."

"Then that's it."

"But if you don't tell the police —"

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Dex's lips twisted impatiently. "They'll figure it out. Don't underestimate the cops. They set you aside because your alibi looked perfect. And they set suicide aside because there was no gun and no note; and probably Farrity looked like a good suspect. But they won't pin a thing on Farrity, because he's innocent. They'll get back to you. Sooner than you think."

Ivy looked down at her hands. "It was a mistake, not marrying you. I loved you, Dex. That was the reason I could never learn to love Winston. I tried. Truly I did. If only I had married you —" She broke off, drew a deep breath. And after a while she said in a different voice, "Well, that's all done. But one thing — I never cheated on Winston. And no matter what he thought, I wouldn't have left him because he was broke."

"All right."

"Look at me, Dex."

"I don't want to look at you."

"You were never far out of my thoughts, Dex. Never in the whole time. I kept track of you through Paula — where you were, what you were doing, how you were. If only you knew how many times I wanted to . . . Dex, please look at me.

Dex met her gaze, and her face was as smooth and as solemn as if she were in church. "Dex, I never loved anybody but you. I never stopped loving you. And I never will."

Dex looked at her, and only a little of the way he felt showed in his face. But worse than that — and stronger — was the memory of Paula's warning: *Whether she loves you or not, if she sees a chance to get out — even at your expense — she'll take it.*

He stood up and started toward the stairs.

He was all the way to the foot of the stairs before Ivy caught up with him, grasping his arm with both hands to stop him. The hands on his arm were shaking. "*Please, Dex!* Please don't turn me over to the police. You don't know all of it."

"What's the rest of it?"

"You didn't have all of it right. I did what you said with the gun and the note. But later, driving around in the car, scared and half sick, I suddenly realized how insane — how wrong a thing I was doing. I turned the car around right there, and I was on my way back to replace the gun and note and call the police, when I ran out of gas. That's the truth, Dex. You've got to believe it."

"True or not, it doesn't change anything."

Her eyes clung to his face. The wind blew her yellow hair across her face, and she shook it away. "But there is more. You see, I — I don't really have an alibi."

"What happened to it?"

"I left the party before my husband was killed. I drove around almost an

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hour before I went home and found him. Only one person saw me leave. Ansel McLeen. And he promised not to tell the police. But I think he intends to blackmail me too — in — in a different way."

Dex shook his head. It was a mess, from start to finish.

"Please, Dex, you've got to help me. We've got to get the gun and note back. That way I could take them to the police, tell my story, and be able to prove it. I could return the insurance money, and maybe the company would be decent about it. But this other way — no gun, no note, no alibi — the police would be almost certain to charge me with murder."

Dex said, "Where were you about nine o'clock last night?"

"With Ansel McLeen."

The same alibi for both murders. That wouldn't look good either — especially if the cops broke down the first one.

"What are you going to do, Dex?"

"I don't know." He had to get out of there. Now.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Dex Nolan got into Ivy's green Cadillac and drove three blocks to where the street ended overlooking the ocean; and there he parked the car and sat in it thinking.

The key to the whole problem was still a red-haired woman named Jennie. But he had used up all his leads on her — no, wait a minute. There was still one lead. But not much of one. And how would you go about following it up? It might take time, and time was running out fast now. For all he knew Duquesne's body had already been discovered.

In the end, Dex turned the car around and started up the hill.

A few minutes later he pulled the Cadillac to a stop in front of the ornamental iron gates of Elmo Farrity's house high on the hillside above La Jolla. He tapped the horn, and presently the big albino butterball named Mace opened the gate.

"You again," he said in his bass voice, "and so soon."

"Is Farrity in?"

"Yep. He was just leaving."

"I want to talk to him."

The rosebud mouth formed a smile. "I think it can be arranged, Sweetheart." He stepped aside and Dex followed him through the big living room into the library. Elmo Farrity in a beautifully cut gray suit was just dropping his hat on the desk. He sat behind the desk, waving Dex to a red leather chair, and his smile was not without a Lincolnesque charm.

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"I didn't expect you back," he said.

Dex watched the big albino leave, closing the door behind him. Then he said, "Last night you were interested in a woman named Jennie."

"I still am."

"Why?"

The dark eyes studied Dex. Farrity seemed to turn something over in his mind, then come to a decision. "All right," he said. "I'll lay some cards on the table."

"Go ahead."

"Firstly, because Settlander owed me a lot of money, the cops are trying to link me with his murder. Which is stupid. Dead men pay no debts."

"Secondly," Farrity said, "I've worked hard to build up a good name in this town, and adverse publicity is ruining it — in other words, costing me money.

"Thirdly," Farrity went on, "Ivy is in some sort of a jam which she refuses to discuss with me. And Ivy's troubles — of any kind — are of personal interest to me. Is that enough cards?"

"Almost. Who was it yesterday that told you I was looking for Jennie?" It all hinged on the answer to this question.

"Rafe Ranick."

Dex nodded. "Why?"

"I gave him a good shaking up after Ivy was knocked out in his place. I left him quite anxious to cooperate with me in any way he could."

"Did he say he knew this woman, Jennie?"

"He said he never saw her in his life."

"I think he's lying. I saw his face when I sprung her name on him, and I think he knows her."

"Why would he hold out on me?" Farrity asked.

"He sold you a story that he wasn't mixed up in that drugging in any way. You gave him one shaking up; and he figures that was nothing compared to what he'd get if he admitted he was mixed up in the thing — or even knew who was."

"Um," Farrity said thoughtfully, "you have a point there. But I still don't know what's so important about locating this Jennie."

Dex hestitated. Finally he said, "All right, I'll lay a few cards on the table —" and, briefly, he sketched Ivy's story of what happened the night her husband was murdered, but carefully avoiding any mention of Alford Duquesne's murder, merely saying he had disappeared.

"Describe Jennie again."

Dex described her, and Farrity wrote it down on a pad.

Dex stood up. "There's a deadline on this operation."

"When?"

"Tomorrow morning."

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"Why?"

"Because," Dex said, "that's all the longer I'm going to sit on it."

"I'd make it worth your while — financially."

"Nothing doing. Just knowing this stuff and not reporting it to the cops makes me an accessory. And time is running out. Any minute now some smart cop is going to have a hunch and land on Ivy. God knows why they haven't tumbled already. And when they do, you know how long it'll take them to make her talk.

"If I can walk into headquarters with the gun and the note, pushing Ivy ahead of me, maybe they'll forget the accessory part. But either way I've got to beat the cops to the punch. It's my only way to beat the accessory rap."

"And if I can't find Jennie?"

"I still go to the cops."

"Isn't that a little rough on Ivy?"

"I won't be the fall guy in this thing," Dex said harshly. "Not for her, not for you, not for anybody." He turned toward the door.

"Just a moment."

Farrity said, "Why don't you go with me to see Ranick?"

"I'm not having anything more to do with the mess."

"Then why don't you be my guest for the time being?" Farrity was smiling now, but the expression didn't touch his cold eyes. He waved one hand. "You can make yourself comfortable while I do all the work."

Mentioning the deadline had been a mistake, Dex thought bleakly. Failing to turn up Jennie immediately, Farrity was quite capable of holding Dex prisoner while he looked further. If he didn't find Jennie, and he figured there was no other way out of the mess for Ivy, he was quite capable of . . .

Elmo Farrity, still smiling, pressed something under the edge of his desk, and somewhere in the house a bell jangled harshly.

Dex wheeled and started for the door. He reached for the doorknob, but the door opened before he touched it. The bushy-haired Marty must have been standing right outside the door when the bell rang. Now he was coming in, his right hand holding a gun.

There wasn't time to plan a thing; Dex's reaction was instinctive. He twisted sideways, batting Marty's gun wrist with his left forearm, and grabbing the barrel of the gun in his right hand. Pushing down hard on Marty's wrist with his left hand, and putting all his strength into forcing the barrel up and back toward Marty, he left Marty with the choice of either turning the gun loose or having his index finger broken in the trigger guard.

Marty yelled, releasing the gun; and Dex slammed the butt of it against his temple. Marty sagged against Dex, and Dex took a step backwards to let him crumple to the floor.

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The big butterball was coming fast across the living room, his hand inside his coat; but now Dex had the gun reversed and pointing at him. "Come ahead," he invited harshly, "if you think you're bullet-proof."

The butterball skidded to a halt, looking more startled than scared, his hand frozen inside his coat.

"All right," Dex told the butterball, "take out the gun. But slow, brother. Slow."

Slowly, using his thumb and forefinger, the big white-blond man took out the gun.

"Drop it on that chair, and come in here. And bring Marty with you."

The big man looked at Farrity, and his eyes held a question.

Farrity shook his head. The big man dropped the gun on the chair, walked to the door of the library, rolled Marty over, took a handful of his coat front, and picked him up as easily as if he were a dummy stuffed with straw. It wasn't just baby fat on the big butterball.

"Over by Farrity," Dex said.

The butterball dumped Marty in the red leather chair, and stood beside Farrity. Elmo Farrity's face had done a fast change-over. He smiled and, like Lincoln's, the smile had a sort of sad charm to it.

He said, "You could get killed doing that gun trick."

"So could your stooge." Then, "All right, butterball, let's have the key."

"Key?"

"To the front gate."

Farrity nodded and the butterball flipped the key to Dex, who put it in his pocket. Dex took the key to the library door out of the lock, put it back in on the other side, then stood a moment looking at the three men in the library. Marty was starting to stir.

Dex hefted the gun, and smiled, not humorously, his teeth white against the tan of his face. "You might remember I've got this trinket, next time you try for me."

CHAPTER NINE

At the San Diego Public Library Dex asked for the file of the *Daily Star* for the past three weeks, and sat down to read the Settlander murder case through.

The story had broken seventeen days ago. And it had broken big. But weeding out the sensationalism, the facts were meagre enough. Winston Settlander had died with a .25 caliber bullet in his brain. He owned a Bernardelli automatic of that caliber, and it was missing. The body was

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found in his library which was considerably mussed up, as if there had been a struggle. Settlander's wallet and watch were missing. The body had been discovered next morning when the housekeeper showed up for work. The autopsy set the time of death at approximately ten-thirty of the preceding evening. He was known to have had a business appointment in San Diego earlier in the evening, but nobody knew with whom. And whomever it was with had not volunteered the information thus far.

That's all the police had to start with.

During the next seventeen days the police went through the usual routine — and in the end all they had to show was a theory.

And the theory, as usual, was the simplest story that would fit the facts. Presumably, while Settlander was keeping his appointment, a burglar entered his house. Ransacking the library, the burglar found Settlander's gun, and put it in his pocket. At this point Settlander returned home, unintentionally trapping the burglar in the library. Turning on the light and discovering the intruder, Settlander had grappled with him and in the ensuing struggle several pieces of furniture were overturned. Finally the burglar had gotten the gun out of his pocket and shot Settlander. Settlander, who was described as a strongly built man, would have been considerably handicapped by the fact his right hand was in a cast as a result of an injury sustained a few days before.

Dex read that part again. A cast on Settlander's right hand? Then how could he have written the suicide note? Or had he been left handed? And that raised another question. Dex leafed back in the papers. Yes, Settlander had been shot in the left temple, so that part fitted.

Elmo Farrity's name had come into the case both as a business associate of the murdered man and the host of the party Ivy had attended the night of the murder.

Pictures of Winston Settlander showed a light-haired man with good shoulders, a soft chin and a weak mouth.

A story went into Settlander's younger years in college where he had been something of an athlete. There was a picture of him in a baseball uniform, swinging a bat. Dex looked at that picture a long time.

Winston Settlander was batting right-handed.

Dex Nolan sat back, frowning. In baseball there were such things as switch-hitters — batters who batted either right or left according to the pitcher — and they weren't uncommon either. Nor was it unheard of for a picture to get printed backwards. Still . . .

Dex leafed through the rest of the papers without finding anything, then he left the library. He found a telephone booth and dialed Ivy's number. The housekeeper answered the phone.

Dex said, "Let me talk to Mrs. Settlander."

"I'm sorry, she isn't at home. Will there be any message?"

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"No. I'll call later."

Dex hung up. He thought a moment, then looked up the Polyclinic Hospital's number. He dialed it, asked for Paula Kenzie, and was told she was in surgery.

Well, that was that.

The rest of the day passed slowly.

At four-thirty he phoned Ivy again. She was still out.

Dex sat in her Cadillac on the embarcadero and watched the seagulls follow the fishing boats into the harbor. At five-thirty he phoned Paula Kenzie at her home, and she was there.

She said, "Where are you, Dex?"

"Downtown. Tell me, was Winston Settlander right-handed?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't you know?"

"Well, now that you ask, I'm not sure. Is it important?"

"It might be. How about having dinner with me?"

"That would be fine," Paula said. "Only I've a better idea. Why don't you pick up some steaks and maybe a bottle of wine, and I'll cook dinner at my place?"

"That sounds good."

"In about an hour?"

"It's a date."

Dex headed Ivy's green Cadillac up the sloping streets toward the mesa where Paula's place was; and in his rear view mirror he noted that a cab seemed to be following him. It made three turns behind him; then, probably realizing from Dex's maneuvers that he'd been spotted, the driver sheered off into a side street and Dex didn't see the cab again. But when Dex stopped in front of Paula's place he took Marty's gun from the glove compartment and dropped it into his coat pocket.

Before Dex could ring the doorbell, Paula called through the screen door: "Come in, Dex. I'm in the kitchen."

Dex went in and found Paula in the kitchen, slicing a loaf of French bread. She wore a white short-sleeved blouse, red embroidered around a wide low neck that showed the beginning curves of her lush breasts, and a red and green skirt that flared widely. She wore white sandals and her beautifully shaped legs were smoothly tanned. She looked up, a smile lighting up her homely, wrongly angled face. "Are you hungry?"

"You bet I'm hungry." And, for the first time today, he was.

Dex made Martinis, and while he was waiting for Paula he sat on the sofa and picked up a book that had been lying there. It was the New Techniques in Plastic Surgery.

Dex leafed in it idly, stopping at a pair of photographs which showed

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a woman's face before and after a series of operations. The "before" picture showed a battered face, nose and jaw crooked, one cheek deeply scarred. In the "after" picture the nose was straight and pert, the jaw symmetrical, and there was no trace of the scars that Dex could see. The surgeon had turned that mess into a pretty nice face.

A sound made Dex look up. Paula was standing in the doorway looking at him with an odd expression on her face. "Escape fiction. My own special brand."

"Hardly fiction. Don't they repair faces that way?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"On the face, the underlying bone structure, the muscles, the skin — it depends on a lot of things."

"What about your face?"

The smile faded. She leaned forward to pour the Martinis. "Yes, I've talked to a couple of plastic surgeons."

"What did they say?"

"One said maybe. The other — the best one in the business — said yes. A big job and a long job, he said, but yes. So now I can dream about it. But that's all."

"Why just dream?"

"Because I can't have it. It would cost more money than I could save in a lifetime." She looked broodingly at the Martini in her hand, and her face was somber. "This is a damned dismal subject. Here"— she handed him a glass —"drink up."

Dex took the glass. "What'll we drink to?"

"Crime?"

Dex shook his head. "Make it justice."

"All right. Crime and justice. May they always go hand in hand."

"I'll drink to that." And he did. Then he set down the glass and said, "Have you been thinking about what I asked you on the phone — about Settlander being right- or left-handed?"

"Yes. And I remember now. He had an accident a few days before he was killed. His right hand was in a cast."

"I know that much," Dex said. "But was he right-handed?"

"He must have been, because Ivy was saying something about it being a nuisance. They'd had to transfer money to her checking account and she was having to write all the checks for both the business and the household bills."

Something else occurred to Dex: "How did Settlander hurt his hand?"

"Ivy said it was at Farrity's place. One of Farrity's men slammed a car door on it."

"And it was injured so badly he couldn't use it at all?"

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"Yes."

"You're sure?"

"All I know is what Ivy told me."

"But —"

Paula put a finger over his lips. "That's enough. It's dismal talk like the other, and it'll spoil the party. Now smile. This is a party. Smile."

Dex smiled. She smiled back and presently his smile was real.

"Whew, I'm full." Dex shifted a cushion to a more comfortable position behind him on the lawn swing. They had finished the dinner, stacked the dishes, and now they were sitting in the lawn swing in the small back yard behind Paula's house. The sun was going down and the sky was full of pink and gold. "I don't know when I've been this full."

Paula was silent for a time, then she said abruptly, "Is Ivy paying you much to do whatever you're doing for her?"

"Quite a lot."

"And you're doing it because Pop needs the money?"

"Partly."

"What's the other part?"

"No, you're right. That's why I'm doing it."

"I have some money," Paula said hesitantly. "Almost fifteen hundred. I could lend it to you, then you could pay Ivy and get out of here while you still can. It's going to —"

"It's no good, Paula."

"Why not? It'd just be a loan. The money's lying there in the bank —"

"It's no good because it's too late."

"Are you sure?"

"Very sure."

Paula said, "Is that a gun in your pocket?"

"Yes."

"Are you — afraid of someone?"

"Not as long as his gun is in my pocket."

"Whose is it?"

"One of Elmo Farrity's hoods."

Alarm showed in Paula's face. "Is Elmo Farrity gunning for you?"

"I don't know."

Paula said in a troubled voice, "Elmo Farrity is dangerous, Dex. Believe me, I know. He used to be a racketeer of some kind — maybe still is."

"I know." Dex looked at the sun on the eucalyptus trees. "Do you know a guy named Ansel McLeen?"

"I met him a few times at the Settlander house. He runs an air freight service, and Settlander used to charter his plane to fly freight in from Lower California."

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"What sort of a man is he?"

"Well, he's good looking, and he fancies himself as a ladies' man, but I didn't like him. He's a braggart, I suspect he's a liar, and he's quite offensive when he's drunk. What about him?"

"He's Ivy's only alibi for the night her husband was killed."

Paula was silent a long time, then she said in a level, expressionless voice: "You think Ivy might have killed her husband?"

Dex didn't answer.

"Dex," she said finally, "you asked me if Settlander was right-handed."

"So what?"

"So I said he was, and you looked — well, you looked like I'd hit you in the stomach. What has his right-handedness got to do with it?"

Dex shook his head, not answering.

Her look at him was exasperated, but she didn't speak until the expression was gone from her face. She said in a low voice, "Would it help if you could establish an alibi for the night Settlander was killed?"

"Yes."

"I could say you spent the night here with me."

"That's perjury, kid."

"Let them try to prove it."

"Besides," Dex said gently, "I'm not going to drag you into this mess."

"I want to help you. Can't you understand that?"

Dex shook his head, not speaking.

"You've got to let me help you," Paula said, her voice calm and almost impersonal. "You see, I have a right to help you."

"Why?"

"Because I love you."

"Paula —" Dex began helplessly.

"Now don't feel sorry for me. I know how you feel about me — or rather, don't feel about me — and it's all right."

"Paula, it's no good — talking about this. I'm —"

"You're embarrassed, naturally."

"Paula, you're upset —"

"Of course, I'm upset. I think I've been upset since my first day in a military hospital. Believe me, Dex Nolan, I've seen a lot of men die — good men, useful men, loved men — and nobody prattled about justice. So don't ask me to mourn one like Settlander. If it's a case of lying to save you, then we can lie!"

"Not after what happened last night. There's a witness who can put me right on the scene —" Dex broke off, realizing what he had said.

Beside him Paula made a startled movement. And it didn't take her five seconds to figure out what he had been about to say. Even in the dim light he could see the thunderstruck look on her face.

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"Has there been — another murder?" she whispered.

"I didn't say that."

"Then — then what?"

Dex didn't answer that. The thing to do now was to get out of here before he made Paula some sort of accessory. He moved to stand up, but her hand turned over, gripping his fiercely. Her voice was rough and throaty: "*Has there been another murder?*"

"Dear God," Paula said hoarsely. "Are you sick inside — to risk yourself for a woman who'll use you — and ruin you —" her voice broke and she turned her face away.

"It's not that. I made a deal —"

"A deal!" Paula laughed jerkily.

"I know what you think —"

For a time there was only the quick, hard sound of her breathing; then, as he watched, the tense urgency seemed to run out of her face. She pulled her hand out of his, and her face was tired and old in the faint light.

"All right," she said, and her voice was infinitely weary.

"Listen to me —"

"Leave me alone, Dex. You'd better go."

"Not like this, kid."

"Just leave me alone. I — I lied a minute ago — about being reconciled to your not loving me. I've lived too long with dreams, Dex: dreams about my face being made over into something you'd look at — look at the way you look at Ivy. Dex, I've been a fool —"

"Don't talk like that."

"All right," in the same dead voice. "Just go away. Don't torment me any more. I can't take it —"

CHAPTER TEN

Dex Nolan drove the green Cadillac slowly, deep in thought. Twice he narrowly missed going through a red light. His lips were tight and he scowled without realizing it. Finally he shook his head angrily. He looked ahead, spotted a drugstore, and stopped when he came to it. He put through a phone call to Elmo Farrity's place. The big butterball called Farrity to the phone.

"Nolan?" Elmo Farrity's voice had an irritable sound.

"Yes. Any luck with Ranick?"

"Not yet. He's out of town."

"I told you there was a deadline on this thing."

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"Don't get excited. Ranick will be back this evening. Where are you now?"

"Never mind that," Dex said.

"I want to talk to you."

"Go ahead."

"I can't put it on the phone. Come over to my place."

Dex's laugh was without humor.

"In case I can't get anything from Ranick, I want a little more time," Farrity said.

"You've got until tomorrow morning."

Dex hung up on him. He went back to the green Cadillac and headed it toward La Jolla.

There had been traces of fog already forming over San Diego, but the sky was clear over La Jolla. A big moon washed Ivy Settlander's house with silver. There were lights in the house, and there was a red Jeep parked in the driveway. Dex parked at the curb, walked to the house, and stopped beside the red Jeep to light a match and look at the registration certificate on the steering post.

Ansel T. McLeen
2222 Talcon Place
San Diego, California

Ansel McLeen: Ivy's alibi who was no alibi. Dex hesitated, then instead of ringing the bell, he walked around the house. The sound of the ocean at the foot of the cliff was no more than a soothing murmur, and the slow drift of the breeze was warm and heavy with the scent of night-blooming jasmine. He stopped in a flagstoned patio to one side of a big picture window flanked by French doors which were open to the warm night. Through the big picture window Dex could see into a living room. Ivy was in there, and the man who was Ansel McLeen.

"Where's that drink?" McLeen's voice.

"I'm fixing it, Anse."

The man on the long green sofa was about Dex's build but not as tall. His blond hair was curly; and his features were cleanly cut, tapering from wide cheekbones to a square, faintly cleft chin. He wore blue slacks and a gray short-sleeved shirt that left his tanned arms bare. His tanned feet were bare in leather sandals.

"Put plenty of stuff in that drink. I like to taste my liquor." There was nothing cleanly cut about the way he talked. His words were blurred and drunk.

Ivy looked up from the liquor stand behind him. She wore a silver and green cocktail dress that left her tanned shoulders bare; and her high-heeled shoes looked to be made of silver lace.

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"Here's your drink."

"Good." McLeen put a big dent in it, while Ivy poured a very small drink for herself. Ansel said, "Siddown, baby. Yuh make me nervous, cat-footing around like that."

Ivy sat down in a chair opposite him.

"Nah, nah." Ansel McLeen slapped the sofa beside him. "Over here."

Ivy stayed where she was.

The sound McLeen made was more of a snort than a laugh. "Know something?"

"What?"

"Yuh better be nice to old Anse."

"Anse, you said you had something important to talk about. Please get to the point."

"Awright, I'll tell you." His mouth formed a rubbery grin. "Old Anse wants you sitting right here. Or else." McLeen finished his drink.

"Or else what?"

"Old Anse went to bat for you, baby — alibi and everything. Know why? Cause he goes for you, baby. He's real sweet on you, that's why. But he could still throw you to the cops."

"It's too late for that." Ivy said sharply. "You told the police your story, and now you're stuck with it."

"Wanna bet?"

Ivy's face was very still now, her eyes watching him.

McLeen's grin was drunk and foolish. "I put it to the cops this way. You're a dish. A real dish. Cause I go for you, I lied an alibi for you. But I get to thinking. I got a duty as a citizen. I gotta turn you in. Howzat sound?"

Ivy just watched him.

"Sure, cops mad a little bit. Maybe slap my wrist or something, but I ask you — how they gonna stay mad at a citizen who just dumped a gorgeous, blonde murder suspect right smack in their laps? Now whose lap'll it be, baby — theirs or mine?"

"You swine!"

"Awright," Anse said, "if that's the way you want it." He stood up, fairly steady on his feet. He walked to the liquor cabinet, poured himself a stiff shot, and downed it while he watched her. Then he picked up the telephone beside the liquor cabinet, and dialed zero. "Operator? Gimme police." He waited.

Ivy didn't move a muscle.

"Police? Lemme talk to somebody in Homicide. It's about the Settlander —"

Ivy had taken three quick steps and broken the connection. Anse reached for her, but she stepped out of range of his hand and he didn't follow her.

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He stood grinning at her, and his eyes touched the sofa then went back to her. "Ready to sit down and talk things over with old Anse?"

Ivy stood tensely, looking at him for a long five seconds, then the tension seemed to run out of her. The thinness slowly left her lips. The curves filled out in them, and they showed the small beginning of a smile. "You weren't bluffing, were you?"

"Old Anse don't bluff, baby."

"Sit down. I'll mix us a drink."

McLeen reached for her again, but again she stepped just out of his reach, her smile fuller. "What's the hurry? There's plenty of time. Sit down. I'll mix you a drink."

Behind him Ivy mixed five fingers of Scotch with one of water. With his eyes off her, her smile was gone; and the look in her eyes was strange and a little wild. She handed McLeen his drink, picked up her own, and sat down beside him. She was smiling again, and she fended his arm without seeming to. "Here's to us."

McLeen took three long swallows. "I'm onto you."

Ivy raised an eyebrow.

"Tryin to get me drunk," he said.

Her smile was lazy. "I think I'd like to get tight myself."

"Yeah — you and me and the world spinning like a li'l old merry-go-round." He finished his drink. "Tell me somep'n."

"What?"

"Yuh really knock off your husband, or not?"

"*Anse!*"

"Gotta theory myself. Gotta theory." His voice was thick and blurred. "Yuh knocked him off, then went out to that gin mill and fed yourself some knockout drops. Howzat for a theory?"

Ivy stopped smiling. "If you're going to talk like that, you can just get out."

"Just joking." McLeen turned the rubbery grin on her. "But wouldn' make any difference to me if yuh did. Can't shock old Anse. Got no more morals than a old hound dog."

"I'll get you another drink."

Ivy got up, mixed another five fingers of Scotch with one of water, gave it to McLeen, and stood looking down at him. McLeen knocked down half of it in two gulps, then looked up at Ivy. He was very drunk now, his eyes not quite focused, head lolling a little, his movements clumsy. Almost hesitantly, he reached out and ran one hand along the curve of her hip.

"Pretty dress," he mumbled. "All green'n silver. Pretty li'l . . . ole . . . tiger cat . . ." And suddenly he made a sound in his chest that was pure animal. Ivy tried to back away, but his arms were around her, clumsy as any bear, and her struggle to get free rolled them both onto the floor.

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Ivy was a clawing, scratching fury in his arms; her nails raked his face, and even in his alcoholic fog it hurt enough to make him yell. She kicked him with her knee, and he yelled again. Ivy almost got free then his hand caught in the neck of her dress, there was a ripping sound, and she was yanked forward across him, her dress torn open to the waist. McLeen was still making crazy animal sounds; and Ivy was fighting him with a desperation that had no breath to waste on sound.

She was tangled up with him on the floor against the sofa; so that Dex had to grab twice before he got McLeen's foot; but when he had it and got his weight into twisting it, Anse's yell topped anything he'd done so far, and he turned loose of Ivy.

McLeen rolled free of Ivy, and if he'd moved any slower Dex probably would have broken his leg, because he had all his strength into twisting that foot. Then McLeen kicked out with his free foot; and by some crazy luck his heel caught Dex squarely in the jaw.

It was as if a bomb had gone off inside his head.

He lost his hold on McLeen's foot; dimly he felt himself going over backwards to smash into a chair or something that collapsed under him; and, drunk or not, McLeen was right in there fighting. The blows seemed to come from everywhere. Dex was locked with him, socking, gouging, all in a blind red haze; and there wasn't a thought in Dex's raging brain except to kill McLeen.

Then dimly he realized McLeen was no longer fighting back. Dex was astraddle of him, hands locked on his throat, thumbs sunk into it; and somebody — Ivy — was yanking at his arms, screaming, begging him not to do something. Then sanity cut through the red haze like a knife. Dex realized where he was and what he was doing, and he jerked his hands away from McLeen's throat like they'd been scalded.

McLeen didn't move. His face was red and congested, and he didn't seem to breathe.

"Oh, my God!" Ivy moaned. "*Oh, my God!*"

Dex rocked McLeen's head to one side then the other. He shook him by the shoulders, lifting him and letting him drop back. A strangled groan came from McLeen, then he was breathing again.

Thank God for that.

Ivy was beside them on her knees, her dress hanging around her waist, her face like gray paper; and she was so scared she couldn't form her words right: "Is — is — is —"

"He's not dead."

"He's — he's —"

Dex shook him, and his eyes flickered open. Dex said, "He's all right."

"*Oh, thank* —" She didn't finish it. She buried her face in her hands, still on her knees, bent over and rocking from side to side.

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Ansel McLeen sat up with a groan. He tried to say something, but all that came out was a croak. He massaged his throat and he looked a lot less drunk than he had a few minutes ago.

Dex said in a voice he didn't recognize, "Get out of here."

McLeen looked from him to Ivy, and he didn't move. Dex reached down, grabbed a handful of McLeen's shirt, and he stood up fast. Dex turned him toward the door, shoved, and he kept going, holding his throat and weaving only a little. The front door opened, presently the Jeep started outside and drove away. Dex looked at Ivy.

She still knelt there on the floor, but she had pulled her dress together. The wildness was still in her face, and she was shaking all over. She reached up her hand, and Dex pulled her to her feet.

He said, "Do you want a drink?"

She shook her head.

"I need one." Dex poured a short one, drank it, and the tight sickness in his stomach uncoiled a little. He looked at Ivy. "You'd better put some other clothes on."

"Where — where did you come from?"

"The patio."

"You — you were there — all the time?"

"Only a few minutes."

She drew a long, shuddering breath, then straightened her head.

She looked down at her dress. "I must be a sight. May I have a cigarette?"

Dex lit one and handed it to her. She took a long drag, held it, then blew out the smoke. She did this twice more.

"Go lie down," he said.

"Could you — would you stay around? For a little while? I mean I don't want to be alone — for a while —"

"I'll stick around. I want to talk to you as soon as you're feeling better. Now go lie down."

"All right."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

After Ivy left the room, Dex walked to the open French doors, and stood there pulling the soft night air into his lungs.

He turned, and Ivy was standing there. She wore a housecoat of some pale, shiny material that covered her from throat to toe; and her hair looked like dark silver in the moonlight.

"I feel better now." She sounded better too.

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"That's good."

"What was it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Was your husband right-handed?"

"Yes."

"And his right hand was in a cast?"

"That's right."

"Then how did he write the suicide note?"

"On his typewriter."

"Was there any written signature?"

"Yes," Ivy said.

"Was it your husband's handwriting?"

"It was just a pencilled scrawl he'd made with his left hand."

"You couldn't tell if it was his or not?"

"It was just a scrawl. What are you getting at —" then understanding flowed into her face. "You mean you think he may have been murdered?"

"Well, the note certainly doesn't prove he wasn't."

"But — but who would do a thing like that?"

Dex said, "That point can be threshed out later."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean we're going to the cops with everything."

"You mean you haven't told the police about me yet?"

"Not yet."

"Have you found my purse — no, you'd have known about the note if you had." She was silent, looking out to sea. The fog bank was much nearer now. "You did say — *we* were going to the police?"

"Yes, I'm going with you. Tomorrow morning you and I and a lawyer will have a conference with the police and the insurance people. You'll return the money. With any luck, maybe we can make a deal with the company not to press charges."

"But what about the other part of it? If I have no alibi, and there's only my word that there was a suicide note — won't the police think I murdered my husband?"

"There's a chance they will."

"What are my chances of beating a charge like that?"

Dex said, "The insurance company is your ace in the hole."

"I don't see how."

"They'll love the idea of getting that hundred grand back. Maybe the cops will say you murdered your husband. But if the cops make it stick, then the insurance company is going to have to shell out the money — not to you but to his next of kin. Suicide is the only verdict that will let the insurance company off the hook; and they'll spend more time and money tracking down that note and gun than you or I or the police put together could. If they can be found, the insurance company will find them."

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"But it's still a risk? And not a good one?"

"It was a bad risk the second you put the note and gun in your purse."

Ivy put a hand on his arm, and said in a suddenly desperate voice, "*Do we have to go to the police?*"

"You know we do."

Ivy said, "You will stand by me?"

"Yes."

Her smile got softer, more real. "Because you believe what I said this afternoon — about never loving anybody but —"

"Because I'm in the mess almost as deeply as you are now," Dex's voice was harsher than he intended. "We can't do anything but stand together."

That wiped the smile away, leaving her face almost stolid. "Then there's nothing left of what we had?"

Dex looked down at her; and he was remembering the way he'd felt this afternoon when she said she loved him.

She was waiting for the answer to her question; and he knew now, with the same gray bitterness of this morning, what the answer was. But all he said was, "I don't know, Ivy."

She looked away, and after a time she said matter-of-factly, "Where shall I meet you tomorrow morning?"

"Suppose I pick you up here about eight-thirty?"

"No, I'd rather meet you. Where?"

"At your lawyer's then. Who is he?"

"Leon Weyright. In the Lenhurst Building. At nine o'clock. I'll call him tonight."

"All right."

The fog had swallowed the moon now. The first streamers of it were slipping up the cliff on a sharpened breeze; and the soft air had a suddenly clammy touch to it. Dex could feel Ivy shiver at his side.

He said, "I'll be going now."

Dex didn't drive directly to a motel. He started to, but he got to thinking about Ansel McLeen. There was one detail of that scene at Ivy's house that kept coming back into mind; and now he mulled it over. McLeen had advanced a drunken theory that Ivy had killed her husband, then gone to a tavern and fed herself knockout drops. Yet all the time Ivy had been mixing drinks behind McLeen's back, and he'd been downing them without the slightest hesitation. He must have realized that Ivy had every reason to want him knocked out for the evening, yet he hadn't been worried. Why not? Because he didn't really believe she'd drugged herself in the tavern?

Because he knew who had?

Dex thought about it. Ansel McLeen owned an air freight line. He'd been associated with Winston Settlander. He was plainly in love — if you could call it that — with Ivy.

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What was McLeen's address? Something with a lot of two's — 2222 Talcon Place.

2222 Talcon Place turned out to be a two-story apartment building high up the hill on the Point Loma side of San Diego Bay. Dex scanned the mailboxes, found the one with McLeen's apartment number, and climbed the outside stairs to the apartment. Lights were burning inside, the curtains were not drawn, and Dex could see into an unoccupied living room. He pushed the doorbell.

Nobody answered, and after a couple of minutes he pushed it again. It rang half a minute. Nobody answered it. McLeen either wasn't at home or he'd continued drinking and passed out in there. Dex tried the door and it was locked; and only then did he see that the key was in the lock. McLeen must have been pretty drunk.

Dex turned the key in the lock, and went in. He dropped the key on the table, and called, "Anybody home?"

Nobody answered.

Dex glanced around at a room that was a standard decorator job, on the expensive side.

The pictures on the wall told you more about Ansel McLeen. All were enlarged photographs, and all contained Ansel McLeen.

And in the next room, the real Ansel McLeen, sprawled across an oversized bed, snoring. An open bottle of Scotch stood on the table beside the bed; and, remembering another open bottle of Scotch, Dex sniffed at it.

Just Scotch whiskey.

Carefully and methodically Dex searched the apartment. He found a gun, but it was an Army .45. And he found letters — many letters, most of them from women — but none written by Winston Settlander just before he shot himself. And none mentioning a woman named Jennie.

So much for that, Dex thought, looking down at the bruise marks showing on the snoring McLeen's throat. It was just one more bright idea that had ended in a blind alley.

Dex was walking toward the front door when the phone rang. He stopped, looking at it. It rang four more times, Dex hesitated, then picked it up.

"Hello?" A man's voice. "McLeen?"

"Yeah," Dex grunted.

"Sam Zolweg at this end. The June first shipment going to come through on schedule?"

Just a business call. Dex grunted, "Yeah."

"Elmo suspect anything?"

Dex's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "No."

"You sure? Because if he does, I'm getting out right now. I'm not tangling with that guy. Not for all the junk in Mexico. You're sure now?"

"Yeah."

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"What's all this yeah and no stuff? Somebody there you can't talk in front of?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. I just called to tell you I was in town. Usual place — Gregshaw Hotel, under the name of Arnold Pender. Got it?"

"Yeah."

"Be seeing you, boy." Sam Zolweg broke the connection. Dex hung up and stood frowning at the phone.

What had all that meant? Something was being pulled behind Elmo Farrity's back, that much was plain. But what? Sam Zolweg had mentioned all the junk in Mexico. In Farrity's circles junk usually meant dope, but Zolweg could have used the word to mean anything. And who was Sam Zolweg? The name jogged a memory somewhere in his mind, but he couldn't pull it into focus. He tried a little longer, but it wouldn't come. He shrugged and let it go.

Dex drove to the same motel where he'd stayed last night, registered under the same name, and only when he went to his room, did he discover his suitcase was no longer in the back seat of Ivy's green Cadillac. He thought back over all the places he'd been today, and it could have been stolen at any one of them. He should have locked the car. Well, he had worse trouble than that. He went to bed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NEXT MORNING DEX NOLAN was at the law offices of Leon Weyright at a quarter of nine. The girl at the desk said, "Yes, Mrs. Settlander has an appointment for nine o'clock. But she hasn't arrived yet. And Mr. Weybright just called to say he will be delayed an hour or so. Will you sit down?"

Dex sat and waited restlessly while the clock's hand crept toward nine. The clock passed nine, then nine-fifteen, and there was still no Ivy.

Dex phoned her house, and there was no answer. She could be on the way, but there was a cold premonition forming in Dex's mind. At nine-thirty he phoned again, and the phone was not answered.

Dex hung up and later, at five minutes of ten, he called Ivy's number again. This time a woman's voice said, "Mrs. Settlander's residence."

"Who is this?"

"I'm the housekeeper."

"Is Mrs. Settlander there?"

"No, sir."

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"Was she there when you arrived?"

"No, sir."

Dex swallowed. "Would you look in her room, and see if she spent the night at home?"

"Well, I—"

"This is the police," Dex said sharply. "Now go look."

"Yes, sir."

She was gone the better part of a minute. Then she said, "I—I don't know if she did or not."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"Well, the bed is rumpled a little on top. But it wasn't turned back, and the sheets aren't wrinkled."

There was a strained, hard-hit look on Dex's face now. He said, "Thank you," and hung up.

He stood up and started out of the office.

The girl at the desk said, "Aren't you going to wait for Mr. Weybright?"

"No."

"What shall I tell—"

Dex waved the question away, striding out the door.

Downstairs in the lobby, a thought struck him. He folded himself into a phone booth and phoned Elmo Farrity.

Farrity said, "I've been waiting to hear from you."

"Have you seen Ivy?"

"No."

"What did you get out of Ranick?"

"Nothing. He'd seen Jennie around a number of times, but he didn't know her full name nor her address."

"You think he was lying?"

"No." There was a grim finality in the word. Then: "Listen, Nolan, you've got to hold up on going to the police—"

Dex hung up on him.

He sat in the booth staring at the reflection of his battered face in the glass. *It's tag, and you're it, brother. She has quit the game and left you to play it out alone. And where do you go from here?*

One thing sure: he wouldn't get the answer sitting here in this phone booth. He got out, walked to the entrance to the building, bought a newspaper there, unfolded it; and as he stared at the front page, his face got a little grayer under the tan.

Alford Duquesne had finally made the headlines.

Feverishly Dex skimmed through the article. Following up an anonymous tip from a man over the phone, the police had discovered Alford Duquesne's body in the cottage in Imperial Beach. The big mystery—the reason the killing was rating such a splash on the front page—was the

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woman in the case. She had rented the place two weeks ago, giving her name as Mrs. T. J. Darsie of Redlands. The realtor described her as blonde and very pretty; and she'd been driving a green Cadillac. The neighbors remembered her too, chiefly because they saw her so rarely; and she always parked her green Cadillac at the curb, never in the garage. Mrs. Darsie was missing, and thus far the police had failed to locate her.

Dex's face had a dazed look.

Blonde and pretty and driving a green Cadillac. That sounded like Ivy. It might be just a coincidence, but Dex didn't believe it. Not with Ivy missing this way.

He finished the brief article. The neighbor who had seen him the night Duquesne was murdered, hadn't come forward to describe him yet. But he would — Dex had no doubt of that. And after reading that description, Elmo Farrity — or any number of other people who knew he'd been on Duquesne's trail — would throw his name into the investigation. Dex pulled at his collar, a strange, suffocating feeling in his chest.

And Ivy had pulled out, leaving him to face it alone.

Abruptly he folded the paper, put it in his pocket, and started back to where he had left the green Cadillac. He turned a corner, and stopped dead in his tracks.

There was a police car beside the Cadillac. One cop was sitting in it, and the other was standing beside the Cadillac, looking into it.

Good God! How had they worked so fast?

Dex wheeled away, walked fast back around the corner; and the feeling inside him now was the sickest thing he ever knew.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DEX NOLAN DIDN'T know how long he'd been walking aimlessly, his mind stunned by this final development, when he looked and, with a start, realized he was on the same street where Alford Duquesne's apartment was.

He walked to the apartment, and knocked on the manager's door. The thin, bloodless old woman answered the door, and she looked startled. "You!"

Dex's face was calm and relaxed. He spoke quietly, naturally, "I'd like to talk to you, if I may?"

"About what?"

"Well," Dex smiled, "I'm a private detective —"

"So *that's* what that fuss was all about day before yesterday."

"Yes. I'd like to ask a few questions."

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"About him?" she nodded toward Duquesne's apartment.

"Yes, and of course I'd expect to pay you for your time."

There was a five dollar bill in Dex's hand; and the old woman hesitated, looking from it to the phone on the wall of the hall, probably thinking of the police at the other end of it. The five dollar bill won.

"All right, come in." She picked up the five spot with a clawing motion.

The inside of her apartment was furnished as poorly as Duquesne's had been, but it was clean beyond all expectation. She didn't invite him to sit down.

Dex said. "I noticed the pay phone is just outside this door. From inside your apartment can you hear what's being said over it?"

"I don't see it's any of your business."

"It's what I'm paying you the five dollars for."

"Well, maybe I can hear a little if my door happens to be open a crack."

"Did you hear Alford Duquesne make any calls day before yesterday after I left? Or receive any?"

"He got one I know of. Answered it myself. It was either a man or a pretty hoarse woman."

"Before or after I left?"

"After. He made this phone call I couldn't hear on account of the folks upstairs was playing their radio so loud; then about an hour or so later, came this call I answered. I called him to the phone."

Dex could feel his heartbeat picking up. That could have been the call that sent him to Imperial Beach — a call from a hoarse woman.

Aloud he said, "What did he say on the phone?"

"Well," she pursed thin lips in an effort to recall. "There was that fool talk about him calling her his tishun-haired fairy godmother —"

"What kind of hair?"

"Tishun, it sounded like to me."

"Titian," Dex said suddenly. "Red-headed."

"Is that what it means? That man always talked crazy that way. Anyhow he got serious then, and said something about another payment. He listened a while and said 'yes' and 'no' a few times; then I heard him repeating an address, and I knew he was out there writing it on my clean wall. Well, you can bet I walked right out there and made him take it off. I swear, I told that man a hundred times —"

"What was the address?"

"Oh, the address — some place in Imperial Beach. I don't remember the street. Listen, Mister, you're just asking the same questions as the police. Why don't you go down and talk to them? Probably they want to see you, because they were mighty interested in that fight you had over there."

"Did he have any other visitors that day?"

"Not that I know of. Of course, Zona's cousin showed up, but they

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didn't come inside to talk. Him and her, they just —" She stopped suddenly, snapping her fingers. "Murno, that was his name. I couldn't remember for the police. Murno, or something like that."

"The cousin?"

"Yuh-huh. He drives a taxi or something down in Tijuana."

"Could the name be Moreno?"

"That's it! I told the police I'd remember."

"What was his first name?"

"Search me. I never knew. Look, Mister, I can't stand here talking to you all day. I got housework to do, and —"

"All right," Dex said. "I'm leaving."

Outside, Dex walked thoughtfully along the street. A red-haired woman with a hoarse voice had sent Duquesne to his appointment with death. He had no lead as to her whereabouts, he couldn't reasonably hope to find her in the short time left to him; but there was another angle — the girl, Zona. If she had seen, or even caught a glimpse of who opened the door to let Duquesne into the house . . .

He hailed a passing taxi, and said, "Take me to Tijuana."

Dex found a drugstore in Tijuana, looked in the telephone directory, found the address he wanted, asked a policeman how to get there, walked two blocks, and turned onto a side street. Dex climbed the dusty-smelling stairs, and knocked on the door numbered two.

A voice said, "Come in," in Spanish; and Dex turned the knob and went inside.

It was a small office with a desk, a telephone, a wall of files, and a small, fat little man in a neat pin-striped blue suit and a wisp of a mustache. He stood up. "*Buenos dias, Señor.*"

"*Buenos dias,*" Dex said. He spoke enough Spanish to get by at it, but he was more comfortable in English. "You speak English?"

"But of course. What is your trouble?" His name was Tiburcio Pomares, and according to the telephone directory he was a private detective.

"I want to find a Tijuana cab driver named Moreno — I don't know his first name, but he has a cousin named Zona. I want a fast job, and it's worth twenty bucks to me."

The detective's nod was polite. "May I ask — ah — why you wish this man found?"

Dex started to say no, then said, "I owe him some money. I'm leaving for San Francisco at noon, and I want to pay it before I go. Think you can do it?"

"I can certainly try."

"Fine." Dex gave him a twenty dollar bill. "I'll be in that coffee shop across the street. Bring him to me there."

"*Si, Señor.*"

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Dex was on his third cup of coffee when a battered taxi pulled to a stop in front of the coffee shop, and Tiburcio Pomares got out of the cab with the driver. They came into the coffee shop, and Tiburcio Pomares made the introduction: "*Señor*, this is Elpidio Moreno. I'm afraid I didn't get your name."

"It doesn't matter," Dex said. Then to the driver, "Sit down."

Pomares said, "Will you need me any more?"

"No. And thanks."

"*De nada, Señor.*" He bowed and left.

Dex looked at the driver. His uneasy smile showed broken teeth. "There was talk of some money?" he said.

"Sit down."

They sat down, and Dex laid a ten dollar bill on the table. "I want to talk to Zona."

The driver's uneasiness became plainer. "But she is in San Diego." He looked at the ten dollar bill but he didn't pick it up.

"You know better than that. After Duquesne was killed, she pulled out of San Diego. I want to talk to her."

"You are — of the police?"

"No. All I want is to talk to her. There won't be any police or any trouble of any kind come out of it. Now where is she?"

Moreno looked at the ten dollar bill, hesitated, then said, "you will make no trouble for her?"

"Not unless you make me. All I want is to ask some questions."

Moreno hesitated a moment longer, then shrugged. "All right. I'll take you to her."

The house was in the outskirts of Tijuana, a hilly district where the streets were gravelly ruts.

Moreno said, "Maybe I'd better go in first."

"All right."

He went into the house, and returned minutes, later.

Dex went in.

There were two rooms. The one where Dex was held two narrow beds, a wooden table, five straight-backed chairs, a wood stove and bin, and a metal sink with one faucet above it.

Then Zona came in from the other room. Her eyes were red and swollen, and she looked scared.

Dex smiled at her. "I'm not the police, Zona. There isn't going to be any trouble. All I want is to ask some questions. All right?"

"I — guess so." Her voice was barely audible.

"Who did Alford expect to meet night before last at the house in Imperial Beach?"

"A woman named Jennie."

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"Why did he go to see her?"

"He said she was going to give him some money."

"For what?"

"He didn't say."

"How much?"

"He said a lot."

"Did you get a look at this woman that night?"

"No."

Dex said, "Could you see if it was a man or a woman?"

"No." Zona spread her hands helplessly. "All I know is he said we were going to be rich and ride around in big cars. He was going to buy me jewelry and fur coats and we were going to get married — for real — in a church — and — and —" She started to cry, her shoulders hunched over, her face in her hands.

Dex waited. There was nothing else to do.

"Please," Zona said, "I don't want any trouble with the police. I didn't do anything —"

"Look, did you touch anything in the house where he was killed?"

He could see her face tighten up. "No."

"You didn't take anything away with you?"

"No."

"How was he lying when you found him?"

"On — on the floor."

"You didn't touch him?"

"I — I just feel his pulse. He — was dead." Dex thought she was going to cry again, but she choked it back.

Dex took a shot in the dark: "Where did he carry his money?"

"In — in his back pocket."

"You didn't touch it?"

She raised her eyes, and they were wide and scared. "No, I don't touch a thing, *Señor*. I so scared I don't think of a thing but to run." Her accent was very Spanish now. "Please, Señor, I good girl. I no steal —"

"Take it easy." Dex smiled to relax her. "I'm not here to make trouble. It was your money. You were his wife."

She shook her head. "We were not married."

"You lived with him two years, didn't you?"

"*Si*."

"Then you're his common-law wife. It's just the same as if you had a license and were married by a judge."

"You sure of this thing?"

"It's the law. Where is that billfold?"

"I — I have it. *Señor*, I very poor girl. I need the money —"

"All I want is to look through it."

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She hesitated, then turned half away from Dex. She flipped up the flaring red skirt, and took the tan pigskin billfold from the garter above her knee. She dropped the skirt, and handed the billfold to him without taking the money out of it.

Dex took it. He didn't really expect to find anything. After all, he'd been through this billfold day before yesterday and found nothing. But you had to be thorough.

He opened it. He riffled through the money, and there was roughly five hundred dollars there. And that's when he caught a flash of white that he had missed the other time. He pulled it out — a small folded sheet of paper — and opened it.

Scrawled hastily at the top was: 1G80838. An automobile license number. Below was written: Nate Gelfane Detec. Agcy. And at the bottom: Greta Chanslor, 117 Grobeck Lane, San Diego.

Pay dirt.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

In a taxi headed back to San Diego, Dex settled back to do some thinking.

Why had Ivy rented the cottage in Imperial Beach under an assumed name? Had she planned to go into hiding? If so, why so near San Diego?

And where was she now?

Assume she found the body last night. She realized how bad it looked — she had tampered with the suicide evidence, Duquesne had blackmailed her and there was a check to prove it, and there he was dead in a house she had rented under an assumed name, a house the cops would say she rented for the express purpose of killing Duquesne. All that could easily have scared her badly enough to make her run.

And running was the worst possible thing for her to do. Not that they wouldn't catch her soon enough.

And — another chilling thought — the cops could easily set it up that Dex had done both of the murders. Outside of the lack of alibi and his presence at the scene of the second murder, they had little real evidence against him. But Dex knew how little real evidence some convictions are based on. And if the killer saw Dex was on the spot, he might just manufacture some evidence to throw into the case. *Such as the clothes in that stolen suitcase.*

He thought about it all the way in to San Diego; and the key was still a red-haired woman named Jennie.

In the outskirts of San Diego, another thought occurred to him. Suppose

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Ivy had just been detained, instead of having fled? He told the cab driver to stop at a phone booth. He phoned the lawyer, Weybright.

The secretary said, "No, I'm sorry, Mrs. Settlander never did show up for her appointment."

"Thank you."

That was that. Dex hung up, and leafed in the telephone directory. There it was: Greta Chanslor, 117 Grobeck Lane. Dex hesitated, then dialed the number.

"Hello," a hoarse voice said.

Dex gripped the phone. "Who is this?"

"Greta Chanslor. Who did you want?"

"Sorry, wrong number." Dex hung up. He walked back to the taxi, and the excitement had brought color into his face. Maybe he was going to crack this case in a hurry.

117 Grobeck was in the older part of Ocean Beach.

Dex told the cab driver to wait. He walked up to the blue, peeling front door, and rang the bell.

Then the door opened.

She didn't have red hair. Nor large shapely breasts, Nor did she wear a blue dress cut down to here. This woman was small and bony, and her face was as weatherbeaten as the house. Her hair was a mousy gray, not tidy, and she wore a stained silk wrapper, and new blue satin slippers over bare feet. She looked tired, as if she'd been tired for a long time.

Dex said, "Miss Greta Chanslor?"

"Yes." The hoarse voice.

"I — I'm Joe Cromer. I'm an insurance investigator."

"Oh?"

"It's about an accident, an automobile accident in which we believe your car figured."

"I haven't run into anybody."

"Does anyone else have the use of your car?"

"Well, my sister uses it sometimes. Just how much damage was done?"

A sister. The spark of hope was fanned back to life inside Dex again.

He said, "According to our client, your car sideswiped his, and failed to stop. Is your sister at home?"

"No, Jennie is out."

Jennie! Dex drew a deep breath. At last the key was in his hand. No, almost in his hand.

She asked, "How much damage was done?"

"Not too much."

"I don't carry any insurance."

"It won't run over twenty dollars. Where does your sister work?"

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"She — doesn't work."

He said, "When do you expect her back?"

"I don't know exactly." Greta Chanslor looked oddly uneasy as she said that.

"An older sister, is she?"

"No, quite a bit younger."

"Our client said he thought a red-haired woman was driving. Could that have been your sister?"

"Yes. Jennie has red hair."

Dex could feel a singing feeling inside him now. He said, "And you have no idea where I might reach her?"

Maybe too much of excitement was showing in his face, or maybe she just sensed something. Whatever it was, she was definitely stiffening up. Her, "No," was quick and brittle.

That was enough. Dex said. "Well, I'll get in touch with her later. And thank you for your time."

"That's all right."

Dex suddenly heard the frightening sound of a police siren. And before he could move, there was a black and white police car in front of the house. Then he took a grip on himself. It was nothing to get panicked about. He had Jennie now — or as good as had her.

The cop who got out of the car was a county sheriff's deputy, and he said, "I'm looking for Miss Greta Chanslor."

"That's me," the woman said, a shake in her voice. "What's wrong?"

The officer gave Dex a glance, and said, "Perhaps nothing. Don't get alarmed. Do you have a sister named Jennie Chanslor?"

Greta's face was suddenly as white as paper. "What about her?"

"Now don't get excited. We want you to come with us."

"What for?"

"To make an identification."

"Identification!" Greta Chanslor whispered. "She's not — she's not —"

The sheriff's deputy looked uncomfortable. "This woman was murdered and —"

"*Murdered!*"

Dex caught her. She hadn't fainted, her legs had just given way under her.

"*Jennie . . . Jennie . . .*" she moaned. "*I knew something was going to happen . . . I knew it . . .*"

Dex got her to a sofa, and the deputy went for a glass of water. She waved it away. "I knew it . . . I knew it . . ."

The deputy looked at Dex. "You a friend of hers?"

"No, I was just talking to her about some insurance. You say her sister was murdered? Where?"

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"South of Chula Vista."

"How was she killed?"

"Shot to death. Of course we don't know for sure it's her sister. All there was in her purse was this identification card with her name and who to notify in case of emergency."

Dex looked at the woman moaning on the sofa, and there was a numb feeling in him now.

Another dead end. And the last one. The killer had been one step ahead of him all the way. He straightened his shoulders, and he tried to make his voice natural: "Well, I don't think Miss Chanslor is going to faint. If it's all right with you, I'll be going now." He walked out.

He leaned forward and told the driver to take him to Paula Kenzie's address.

As the cab stopped in front of Paula's house, a red Jeep was just pulling away from the curb. It looked like Ansel McLeen's Jeep, but Dex couldn't see who was driving. He paid off his cab, and walked across the lawn to the door. Paula had been standing there looking after the red Jeep.

Her voice was cool, factual: "What happened to your face?"

"It's not important. Was that Ansel McLeen who just left in the red Jeep?"

"Yes. He was looking for Ivy."

"Why?"

"He didn't say. But he was plenty worried. Has something new happened?"

"It's happened, all right."

"Ivy is mixed up in it?"

"For Ivy, it's curtains."

"What about you?"

"I don't know." Dex pulled the folded newspaper from his pocket. "You haven't seen the morning paper?"

"No."

Dex handed it to her. "Page one, column one."

Paula took the paper. "Come inside."

Dex went inside. Paula sat on the sofa and quickly read the headlines. She looked up, her face bleak. "That's what you were talking about last night?"

"Read the rest of it."

Paula read it, while Dex restlessly walked to the window and stood staring blindly out of it.

Paula said, "Blonde. Very pretty. Driving a green Cadillac. That's Ivy?"

"I think it is. Have you seen her this morning?"

"I haven't seen her for a week."

"I had an appointment to meet her at her lawyer's office. She didn't keep it. Her housekeeper says Ivy didn't sleep at home last night."

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"The bitch!" Paula said through her teeth. "The faithless, scheming bitch!"

Dex turned around. "She didn't know where to reach me. I thought she might have come here looking for me."

Something flickered in Paula's eyes, then the wooden mask came down over her face. "No."

"Running away is the worst thing she could do. Whether she's mixed up in that murder or not."

"What do I care about her?" Paula flared. "She'll land on her feet no matter what happens. But what about you? How deep are you in?"

Dex drew a line across his throat with a finger. "I'm in up to here," he said flatly.

"If only you'd dumped her when I said —"

"It was already too late. Do you have any idea where she might have run to?"

Paula's "No" was almost sullen. "If I knew I'd tell the police."

"Don't you see?" Dex said impatiently. "Even if she killed the guy — I don't think she did — it's still make a big difference if she surrendered voluntarily. It could make the difference between prison and the chamber."

"If she killed him or her husband," Paula said in a low voice, "I don't care what happens to her. She stopped being my friend the day she met you."

"You really hate her," Dex said in a wondering voice. Dex seized her arm and pulled her around. "You know where she is."

"No."

"You do."

Paula turned her head away, and Dex put a hand under her chin to make her face him. "Where is she, Paula?"

"In a minute," Paula said in a dull voice. "First I want to tell you something else."

"Where is Ivy?"

"I remember something you once said — a long time ago, during the war. I didn't understand it at the time, but later I did. And I do now. You said you didn't have any buddies, and you didn't want any — not while there was a shooting war going on. Later, after I'd lost a few patients I'd grown fond of, I realized what you meant. Losing them is like losing a piece of yourself: it can happen only so often, then you can't take it anymore.

"A nurse's life is spent among misery, pain, and death; and if she is to survive as a normal person, she has to be able to detach herself from it. There has to be a door in her mind that she can close so that the things she has to see and do can't touch her. I learned that lesson early. I've always been able to do what I had to do."

"Paula —"

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"There isn't much more." Paula was talking slowly, choosing her words carefully, a crease almost of pain between her brows. "A one-sided love is a terrible thing, Dex. It's like a knife in you, and it never goes away. But I never tried to close that door on it — on you —" she broke off groping for words.

Dex looked away from her eyes.

"But I think I can close it now," she said. "Because I've got to."

"Paula, I don't know what to say."

"There's nothing to say," she said steadily, taking a yellow envelope from the skirt of her pocket. "Here."

It was a telegram, and the envelope had been opened. Dex took the folded sheet from the envelope and flattened it out. It was a night letter addressed to Dex Nolan at Paula's address, and it had been sent from Yuma, Arizona at 2:00 A.M.

> A terrible thing has happened. I don't know what to do. I need your advice. Please meet me at the foot of the rainbow. You know where that is. Please come. I love you.
>
> I. S.

Paula said in her steady voice, "You know where the foot of the rainbow is?"

"Yes."

"You're going to her?"

"Yes."

"Then that's it," Paula said, a small break in the steadiness of her voice. "Go to her if you have to. But don't come back. I can't take it any more."

"There's no time to talk it out now, but I will be back —"

She slipped out of his grasp and started from the room, almost running. "What for?" she cried over her shoulder. "What would you come back to me for?"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WHAT DEX HAD TO DO now was buy a car. And he had less than a hundred and forty dollars to do it with.

It took more than an hour; but at the end of that time, he was driving out of San Diego in a very battered, very rusty Ford coupe.

There was no way to tell if the police had an all-points bulletin out on him yet. It was a chance he'd just have to take. But by the time he was

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forty miles out of San Diego, and still had run into no road block, he began to feel better.

The Ford boiled steadily going over the mountains; but, loose as the motor was, boiling wasn't going to do it much harm. And he'd been right about it drinking oil. It was using roughly a quart every forty miles.

After crossing The Tecate Summit at 4,000 feet, it was mostly downhill as the highway let down into the desert of Imperial Valley. And the lower it got, the hotter it got.

An hour later he found the turn-off he'd been looking for. It cut east from the highway, and it had been made by simply running a scraper across the open desert. And not recently either.

Another ten miles, and he was in a valley he knew well. It was the barest, hottest valley in the world. Dust-devils spun lazily in the thermal updrafts; and on both sides red and pink and ash-colored mountains were jagged shapes that shimmered in the heat haze.

Dex took the last fork that turned west, a trail so little used that sometimes it disappeared completely; then he could look ahead to a softer spot and pick up the twin tracks again. And now he knew what Ivy had been driving, for the only recent marks on the tracks were the heavy cleated marks left by a Jeep.

The churning Ford made the last five miles in something over half an hour. The sun was setting now.

Dex passed a sign. It was just a plank nailed to a leaning post that used to say MAIDEN QUEEN LIZ MINE; but the sun and wind-drifted sand had long since eroded away the lettering. Then the tracks went into a dip, up over a hump, around an outcrop; and there were the mine buildings. And above them the flat-topped pile of ore tailings and the mouth of the mine tunnel.

The big building had finally fallen down. The other two, which were about the size of two-car garages, were sagging but looked good for a few more years.

This was the Maiden Queen Liz Mine, and it had once belonged to Dex. It wasn't the producing mine he'd so recently lost to the banks; this mine was worked out, and had been for years.

Fifteen years ago when his Uncle Jethroe had located it, it had produced a fair grade of ore for a time; then the vein had petered out, and the old man sank all he'd made into trying to locate it again. Broke, he'd done the annual assessment work on it every year to keep the claim in force; and when he died, he'd left it to Dex.

Ivy, naturally, had gotten all excited about Dex inheriting a gold mine. He told her it was nothing, but she wouldn't rest until they'd made the trip to look at it. Dex finally convinced her the mine hadn't been much to begin with, and now it was nothing; but it became a sort of private joke between

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them that there was a pot of gold buried out there somewhere in those rainbow-colored mountains. And that was what she'd meant in the telegram.

But he was there now, and there was no other car anywhere in sight. He killed the Ford's engine, got out, and the only sound was the colicky boiling of the radiator.

Where was Ivy?

Dex ran one shirt sleeve over his face to wipe away the sweat, and walked over to the nearer of the shacks. It had two big doors and they were wired together. Dex untwisted the rusty wire. Inside was a Jeep station wagon, new, or almost new, and dusty. And empty.

Then came a sudden cry from the top of the tailing pile.

"Dex!"

And there she was outlined against the sky, a fine, shapely figure in blue jeans and shirt.

"Dex!" she cried again. "You came!"

Dex started up the forty-foot pile of tailings, and it was hard work in the shifty stuff, so he was a little out of breath when he hit the top. Ivy made a move as if to come into his arms, then something seemed to stop her. Maybe it was that Dex had made no move to open his arms to her. Or maybe it was the strange, almost stunned look on Dex's face.

"Dex, why are you looking at me like that?"

He wasn't looking at her. He was looking past her to the mouth of the mine tunnel.

At what was there.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THERE WAS A FOLDING canvas camp cot; and on it a rubber air mattress, a sleeping bag, and a pillow. There was a folding table with dishes on it, and a glass, knife, fork, and spoon. There was a gasoline stove on a metal stand of its own. There was a folding canvas chair. Back of this were boxes of canned goods, a bucket, a shovel, and a hand-ax. A waterbag, hanging from a spike, dripped wetly on the ground. There was a skillet and two aluminum pans, magazines, books, a pair of binoculars, flashlight, and portable radio. To one side a clothesline ran between a couple of rocks; and hanging from it were a towel, a white shirt, and a pair of socks. Lying on the chair, there was even a flyswatter.

"You didn't forget a thing, did you, baby?"

"What do you mean?"

"Even a flyswatter. That's what I call foresight."

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"Dex, listen to me —"

"You must have started planning this the day after your husband was murdered. *Or was it the day before?*"

"*Dex!*"

"You rented that house in Imperial Beach under a phony name, so you'd have a place to store all this stuff you were collecting. It was in the garage in that Jeep you sneaked in some foggy night when the neighbors couldn't see. No wonder you always parked the Cadillac in the street. All you were waiting for was the money, it was paid yesterday and you banked it — like hell you banked it. It's right here, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"It figured." A wintery smile touched his lips.

"Why are you talking this way?"

"What way?"

"Bitter and sarcastic. Don't you understand why I did it?"

"Not bitter. Just a little breathless, that's all. You planned this thing down to the last detail."

"Dex, whatever it is — whatever you're thinking — say it. Don't just stand there talking that queer stuff. I don't know you when you talk like that."

"You know me, all right. And how well you know me."

"Stop it. *Stop it.*"

He looked at the tunnel mouth in the gathering dusk, and his laugh was a harsh, barking sound. "Why did you send for me? You don't need me. You don't need anybody."

"I told you last night," she said in a low, unsteady voice. "I love you, Dex."

"Or maybe you got cold feet at the last minute; and you figured an ex-cop would know better how to pull this thing off."

"Please understand, Dex. After the first blackmail demand came in, I knew I was going to have to disappear or the blackmailer would bleed all the money from me. Either that or they'd turn the gun and note over to the police, then I'd go to prison. I — I just couldn't face going to prison — not even if it meant defrauding the insurance company of all that money to avoid it. I know it was wrong, but I started two weeks ago to plan this — this disappearance."

"And how you planned it."

"Please let me finish."

"Go ahead. There's plenty of time."

"Then I went to you, and you were willing to help me — so I abandoned this plan. I was going to the police with you this morning. I swear it, Dex. I — I couldn't sleep at the La Jolla house last night. It hadn't bothered me before. I had stayed a few nights with Paula right after the suicide; then I

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went back and I was all right. But last night the place seemed haunted. You remember I told you about feeling as if something were waiting to — to pounce on me — *Dex, please understand* —"

Dex didn't speak nor change expression.

Ivy went on in a low voice, "Anyway, I decided to go down to the Imperial Beach place. And I — and I found him — whoever he was — dead. And I knew then that somebody was out to frame me — to send me to the gas chamber — and I just went all to pieces. I didn't know where to find you — I wasn't even sure you'd — you'd —"

"Understand?"

"Yes. I felt alone and I was terrified — I didn't stop to think. I just ran."

Dex looked at her in the fading light; and she looked alone and scared, the way she said she was. She said she loved him. Maybe she did. He didn't know.

He still loved her. Whatever she was, he wanted her. Paula had said it would come to this.

"Dex, I do love you. I —"

He pulled her against him hard. He fastened a hand in that yellow hair, he pulled her head back, and he kissed her in a way he never kissed a woman before in his life. He could taste blood from a cut lip, and he neither knew nor cared whether it was hers or his. Then her mouth was open and hot under his, and she was starting to shake as badly as he was.

He picked her up in his arms. She made a choked sound in her throat. He started toward the tunnel mouth.

"Dex, what are you —"

He dropped her on the cot.

"Please, Dex — not like this —

"Anse had the right idea with you, baby."

"Not — like this — please —"

"Just like this. This is the way I want it."

"*Please* —"

Dex hooked a hand in the neck of her shirt and ripped. The cloth tore, buttons flew, and she was wearing nothing under it. Her scream was a sound quickly lost in the wide desert.

And maybe it started as rape, but it didn't stay that way. One second she was fighting him wildly, and the next her arms were suddenly around him, pulling him to her, her mouth hot and hungry under his. And maybe she was still crying — she never stopped crying — but she wanted him, and he knew it. It was a wild and bitter thing, full of fury, and ugly as only passion without tenderness can be; and after it was over, she lay there crying until Dex had to get up and go away to get the sound of it out of his ears.

He sat in the Ford; and if he'd had anything on his stomach he'd have vomited, he was that sick.

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He didn't know how long he'd been sitting there. He lit a match to look at his watch, and it was almost ten o'clock.

He remembered then that there had been a radio antenna on Ivy's Jeep. He walked to the Jeep, got in, and turned on the radio.

"The body of a woman identified as Jennie Chanslor of Ocean Beach was found shot to death in a tidal slough near Chula Vista this morning. Sought for questioning is Dex Nolan, former police officer, who has also been linked to two other local murders. Attracted by the odor of deadly cyanide, personnel at the Greyhound Bus depot called police to open a luggage locker in the depot. Inside police found a suitcase belonging to Dex Nolan in which were a small bottle of hydrocyanic acid, a .25 caliber pistol, and clothing bearing the peculiar blue mud of the slough in which the slain woman's body was found."

Dex stared at the radio dial in astonishment.

And he guessed the rest of it before the newscaster even told it.

Tests showed the .25 caliber pistol had not only killed Jennie Chanslor, but Winston Settlander as well. And the hydrocyanic acid with its loose stopper, plus witnesses including the old man who had asked him for a light that night, had tied Dex solidly to the murder of Alford Duquesne.

That explained the theft of his suitcase, Dex thought bitterly. The murderer, with incredible speed, had woven this net of circumstance around him; and now there was an intensive manhunt under way in three states for Dex Nolan.

And that wasn't all.

Ivy Settlander, who for a short time this morning had been under suspicion for the murder of Alford Duquesne and perhaps even her husband, had been completely cleared by two surprise witnesses.

A neighbor of hers, an old woman chronically ill with a heart condition and suffering from insominia, had been sitting at the window of her second floor room from nine until almost midnight the night Settlander was killed. Around ten-thirty she heard what she supposed was a backfire from the direction of the Settlander house. Less than a minute later, Mrs. Settlander had driven up, gotten out of her car, and gone into the house. Minutes later she had hurried back out, jumped into her car, and driven away. The backfire had been a shot of course, and definitely fired before Ivy arrived. There were no other shots during the entire three hours.

Later that same night, the old woman had suffered a heart attack, and had been removed to a hospital in serious condition. Only today had she recovered sufficiently to learn of the Settlander murder, and tell what she knew.

The second "surprise witness" was Ansel McLeen.

He had stepped forward to volunteer the information that Mrs. Settlander had had dinner and gone to a show with him the night Alford Du-

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quesne was killed. He admitted he might have been in error about Mrs. Settlander not having left the Elmo Farrity party the night her husband was killed — after all he'd had quite a lot to drink that night. But he was absolutely certain about being with her the entire evening Duquesne was killed.

Ivy was off the hook, and Ansel McLeen hadn't missed a chance to put a further spoke in Dex Nolan's wheel. He had exhibited a severely bruised throat which he stated was received in a "maniacal" attack by Nolan, caused by his jealousy over McLeen's attention to Mrs. Settlander.

So that now, far from considering Ivy as a murder suspect, the police were actually expressing some concern as to her safety.

Dex Nolan, maniacal killer, the object of a three-state manhunt. He'd been framed neatly and tightly.

Dex sat there a long time. The hours went by, and he sat, his thoughts scarcely stirring now, his brain like a stalled engine. He was tired right through to his bones; and finally he went to sleep without even realizing it.

He awoke with a start, and it was gray dawn. Wearily he got out of the Jeep, went outside, stamping life into his left leg which was still asleep and working some of the kinks out of his back and shoulders.

Then he looked up, and Ivy was standing at the top of the pile of tailings, watching him.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THEY STOOD LOOKING at each other, and neither of them said a word.

Finally Ivy came down the slope of the pile.

She was wearing the blue jeans and a fresh shirt. One thing was plain: there was no forgiveness in her look. Nor had Dex expected any.

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know."

"Are you going to turn me over to the police?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"It's entirely up to you."

She said, "And what does that mean?"

He told her then — about her being in the clear and it being Dex Nolan that the cops were after now. He filled in all the details, and she listened without interrupting. And when he was finished, the winteriest of smiles touched her lips.

"What are you going to do?"

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"Go back and try to straighten things out."

"You think you can?"

"All I can do is try."

"What about me?"

Dex rubbed his bruised jaw, feeling the bite of the blue-black stubble there. "You're still hung up on that insurance. But my hunch is that your husband was murdered. Once that's established, you'll be out of trouble."

"You mean you think I ought to go back with you?"

"I'm through telling you what to do."

She said, "I'm not going back."

"All right."

She didn't elaborate on why she wasn't going back. Dex had a lot of things he wanted to say; but he didn't know how to say them, nor even how to begin. But whether he could or not, he had to try.

"About last night —"

"I don't want to talk about last night."

"All right. I'm sorry, that's all." His voice sounded queer in his ears, unsteady. "You'll — never know how sorry."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"All right."

He got into the Ford, started it, put it into gear, and let out the clutch.

A hundred feet away, he looked back and Ivy was standing there still as a statue.

He rounded the outcrop, dipped into the ravine, and she was out of sight now.

At first he thought he had imagined it — a cry so faint he was hearing it only in his mind, because he wanted to hear it so badly. Then he looked in the rear view mirror. He was out of the ravine now; and he could see across it to where he had left Ivy. Only she wasn't there any more. She was running — toward the ravine — toward him — and her voice was the faintest of sounds, almost lost in the rattle and bang of the old car:

"*Dex . . . come back . . . come back . . .*"

Dex was out of the car before it even stopped rolling. He was out and running and it was only a couple of hundred yards, but it seemed to take forever.

Then she was in his arms at last, they were both trying to talk at once, and she was laughing and crying at the same time. And, with her tightly held in his arms, Dex knew something for once and for always. Whatever happened from now on — for good or bad or whatever — they'd meet it together. And maybe the black nightmare still hung over the two of them, but he wasn't thinking about that. For he was kissing her now, and the way he felt was nothing like last night

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"DEX, WHAT ARE we going to do?"

"Go back."

"According to the radio, they think you killed all those people?"

"Yes."

"Can you clear yourself?"

"All I can do is try."

They'd eaten breakfast and now they were washing the dishes.

"Dex —" she said thoughtfully.

"Yes?"

"I'm still in trouble about that insurance —"

"I wouldn't worry about that. My bet is that Settlander was killed like the rest. You may have to return the money while the thing is being threshed out, but my hunch is that in the end, you'll get it back."

"You really think so?"

"I do. For one thing, a typewritten suicide note signed with a scrawl looks fishy on the face of it. Sure, it might have gotten by in the absence of any complicating factors. But with two murders stacked on top of it, it becomes something entirely different."

"Yes, but suppose that note never turns up? Or if it does, suppose they say we faked it — that actually you killed him so that I'd inherit the money, then when things looked bad for us we faked the note."

Dex made a wry face. The mess had so many angles it made your head ache. If he was convicted, Ivy might go up as an accessory or even accomplice — and that would mean equal guilt.

"What are we going to do, Dex?"

"Go in to Yuma and surrender."

"Why Yuma?"

"San Diego is too far. We'd get picked up on the way. We want this surrender to look voluntary."

Ivy still stood with the half-washed dish in her hand, a faraway look in her face. Abruptly she put down the plate and faced Dex.

"No," she said. "I don't want to go to Yuma to surrender. I don't want us to surrender at all."

"What do you want to do?"

"I think you know."

He did know. And he knew it wouldn't work. He said, "We wouldn't have a chance."

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"I don't want to go back. I want to stay right here."

"We have to leave sooner or later."

"We've got food. I brought a lot. And there's water back in the mine. We could stay here until the food runs out, then perhaps the furor will have died down a little. Meanwhile I could dye my hair and bleach yours. I brought stuff with me. We've got this Jeep station wagon that nobody knows about; and we've got the hundred thousand dollars, which is all right to keep now that you say Winston was murdered. That sounds like a pretty good chance to me."

"It sounds good until you try it. You don't know cops like I do."

"I know. I know." She leaned against him, and he put his arms around her. She spoke with her forehead against his chest. "We've just found each other. I can't bear to lose you so soon."

"We're not licked yet."

"I don't want to think about it. Not about tomorrow or the next day or any day but today. And you."

"I know," Dex said huskily.

"We can stay here today, can't we? We can steal one day and one night from a future that may not exist for us any more."

One day wasn't much. And she was right. After they went back to San Diego to face whatever was waiting there for them, they might never be alone together again.

"One day, then," he said.

"One day." She smiled, lifting her face to be kissed.

After that she wouldn't talk about the mess any more, and she wouldn't let him talk about it. From that minute she acted as if there was no trouble anywhere in the world, nor any people in it but them.

After the sun was down they had supper and washed up.

"It's strange about you, Dex. You're not like other men. You're not like any other man I ever knew."

Dex smoked, not answering.

"You're big and sort of rough looking; and when you're angry you can look at people and it's as if you hit them a physical blow. Honestly, you look at me sometimes, and I can feel it right down to my toes. You haven't many manners and practically no small talk; and you never act as if you give a damn what other people think about you."

"What is this?"

"But you're kind, and you're gentle, and you're honest. You're honest in ways I find hard to understand sometimes. My mind doesn't work like yours, I guess. You think in a straight line. I used to believe you weren't very smart, to think that way, but I know better now. You're more of a man than any many I ever knew."

"What are you trying to prove?"

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She laughed, with a little catch in it. "You big ape. I'm making love to you. Kiss me."

He kissed her, softly, on her closed eyes, the end of her nose, in the hollows on each side of her throat.

"Say you love me, Dex."

"I love you, Ivy."

"And I love you."

He kissed her lips then, and they were cool and trembling a little, but the fire was underneath. It was there . . .

When Dex woke up, the night was far gone. He looked at Ivy and she was sleeping quietly, one hand under her cheek, like a kid. The ghost of a breeze stirred her hair, then it was still again.

And, looking at her, he knew something without debating it or questioning it or even thinking twice about it. They weren't going back to San Diego. Not today nor any other day. It was as if somewhere along the line the thing had been decided without either of them saying a word about it.

He and Ivy were together now; and they were going to stay that way as long as he had anything to say about it.

After breakfast Dex inventoried the canned goods Ivy had brought; and he figured they had enough for about three weeks if they wanted to stay that long.

The radio wouldn't bring in San Diego during the daytime; and it wouldn't bring it in at night very well until Dex took some old wiring out of the mine, and rigged an antenna for it. After that San Diego came in loud and clear. But the reception was better than the news.

The suicide note had turned up in Dex's suitcase.

And they had everything laid out neatly now. Settlander had committed suicide, Ivy had found him and she'd run out with the gun and note in order to make it look like murder, so as to collect the hundred thousand dollars insurance. That fitted the testimony of the insomniac heart patient across the street.

Jennie Chanslor turned out to have a police record of doping and rolling drunks; so the police deduced that she had drugged Ivy and stolen the purse with the gun and note. The bartender, Duquesne, saw her; and instead of calling the cops, he cut himself in on the deal. After that they were blackmailing Ivy — her check to Duquesne proved that.

Ivy had gone to Dex, her old sweetheart, and he had taken over from there. He got the gun and the note back; and he killed Jennie and Duquesne to silence them forever.

They'd wiped one murder off his slate, but the other two were written there larger than ever.

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The police noted that the suicide note had been typed and signed by Settlander's left hand, but the handwriting experts agreed it *could* be his signature. And the insurance company, with a hundred thousand dollars at stake, said it damned well *was* his signature. That, and the fact that Dex had been hiding it, convinced everybody that it was genuine.

Now the insurance company was yammering for the cops to apprehend Ivy, and get their hundred grand back for them. And the press was demanding to know what kind of a police force they had that let a killer like Dex Nolan run around loose.

The all-points bulletin was out for both of them now.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Dex, I've thought until my brain is numb, but I can't figure who would want to frame you for those murders."

"Elmo Farrity."

"I just can't believe it was Elmo. He was always a good friend and — well, frankly I liked him."

"He's a hoodlum. He has a disarming style and a certain polish to him. But underneath he's nothing but a hood, and he never was anything else."

"But why frame you, Dex? He doesn't even know you."

"I was there and the frame fitted."

It was the hot part of the afternoon, and they were sitting well back in the mine where the water seep was.

"Listen," Dex said thoughtfully, "when you found your husband's body, how was it lying?"

"On the floor to one side of his desk. The chair was overturned right beside him."

Dex thought about that. If it had been suicide, muscular contraction as the bullet entered the brain might have kicked the chair over. "Where was the gun?"

"On the floor. Near his hand."

"Where was the bullet wound?"

"Just in front of his left ear. It was horrible."

"Was there a smell of burnt powder in the room?"

"Yes, it was quite strong."

"Were the curtains open?"

"Yes."

"Then anyone standing outside the window could have seen you take the note and gun?"

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"Yes. I didn't close the drapes until just before I left."

"Why did you close them?"

"I don't know. I don't know why I did any of the things I did that night. It's all like a nightmare." She was breathing more quickly now, her words coming in quick bunches. "I've been over it a thousand times in my mind. It's unbelievable that I did what I did. I don't know what—"

"Take it easy," Dex said.

She stopped talking. Dex sat occupied with his thoughts. After a while Ivy said, "What were you getting at, Dex?"

"Assuming that Settlander was murdered — and I believe he was — the killer could have worked it this way. He could have slipped up to the house by the stairs from the beach, which would explain why the old lady across the street didn't see him. He must have known Settlander, otherwise he wouldn't have known about the gun, nor been able to get close enough to shoot him so it'd look like suicide. Anyway he killed him, then your arrival must have driven him right out the back way. He watched you take the gun and note, then — no, he couldn't have followed you without the old lady seeing him. And if he didn't follow you, there's no way he could have known about Jennie stealing your purse."

"No," Ivy said in a small voice.

"Exactly what was in that suicide note?"

"It said he was tired of it — life — and he was getting out. He said goodby to me; and that it was too bad, wasn't it, that I'd never get a dime of that insurance money. He said to tell Farrity he'd settle with him when he got to hell. And that was all."

Dex chewed that over in his mind, and said, "How much do you know about Settlander's business affairs?"

"Not a great deal."

"What about the dealings between him and Elmo Farrity?"

"Farrity owned the Settlander Importing Company."

Dex said, "If Farrity owned him lock, stock, and barrel, what was Settlander so worried about?"

"I'm not quite sure," Ivy mused. "He didn't talk much about it toward the last, but I got the impression he might have misused some of the company funds. I know he'd borrowed heavily on the company's credit, and on the land he owned in the southern part of Arizona —"

"Land he owned himself, or held for Farrity?"

"I don't know. All I do know is that he bought it shortly after Farrity took over."

"How much land?"

"Several thousand acres. It's the awfulest looking country you ever saw. Not as good as where we are now. Just a big bare valley with a dry lake in the middle of it."

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"Why did he buy it?"

"He said it was a good investment."

Dex turned that over in his mind. It got crazier as it went. "You say Settlander had borrowed on the house, the boat, the cars — was that to repay Farrity?"

"On the contrary. He was very insistent that I never even hint of it when Farrity was around. I think Winston was using the money to speculate — perhaps on oil stocks. That's how he lost all the other money."

"But you don't know for sure where it went?"

"All I know is that the lawyers couldn't find a dime of it when they settled up the estate."

It was strange, Dex wasn't even thinking about it, but just like that the name of Sam Zolweg popped into his mind; and with it came the memory of where he'd heard the name before.

"Dope," he said suddenly.

"Who's a dope?"

"Not that kind of dope. Drugs. Heroin, morphine, that kind of dope." Dex told her about searching Ansel McLeen's apartment and answering the call from Sam Zolweg. "Did you ever hear your husband mention Zolweg?"

"Oh, yes. In fact I met Zolweg a couple of times at Farrity's house. He's a fat little man with a big mouth like a frog, and he has nasty, cold, black eyes. I didn't like him."

"He used to be in the dope racket. In San Francisco. The T-men busted it up years ago, and that's the last I heard of him until that night at McLeen's place." Dex snapped his fingers. A few things were starting to make sense now. "And Ansel McLeen runs an air freight service."

"That's right. So what?"

"So Settlander used to charter his planes for some of his importing — say lobsters and stuff like that from the gulf?"

"Yes. However, McLeen has only the one plane. A surplus C-47 he bought from the Air Force."

"Even surplus, they cost plenty. Does McLeen have that kind of money?"

"Come to think of it, no," Ivy said slowly.

"In other words, Farrity might be banking him too?"

"I never thought of that."

Dex was thinking of it; and an idea was beginning to take shape in his mind. "Listen, just where is this land Settlander owned?"

"There's a case of maps in the Jeep. I took them from Winston's car. The property is marked on one of the maps."

"I'll get it."

Dex found the map case, a leather case with Settlander's name stamped on it in gold, and he hurried back into the mine, picking up the flashlight as he went.

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Ivy sorted through the maps. "Here's the one. See? The road to the property has been inked in."

Dex studied it. It was a large-scale map with the road inked in green, with forks and landmarks noted along the route. There was a circle around the property. Lightly pencilled beside it were three dates: May 3, June 1, June 25. And below that: Arnold Pender, Gregshaw Hotel.

Arnold Pender was the name Sam Zolweg had said he was using at the Gregshaw Hotel. And he'd been worried about Elmo Farrity suspecting something. Dex looked up and there was excitement in his face now.

"It looks like your pal Elmo Farrity wasn't retired from the rackets at all. He had the whole thing set up in the names of dummies. Settlander, because he was an importer with a legitimate reason to haul stuff in from Mexico. And McLeen, because he was willing to fly the stuff in. Dope isn't hard to get in Mexico. What's hard is getting it across the border."

Dex drew an imaginary line with his finger from the Gulf of Lower California to Los Angeles. The Settlander property was on the way.

"You see? Maybe the officials at the Mexican border could be fixed; but customs officials at the United States end would be a different proposition, and this way they wouldn't even have to try to smuggle the stuff past them. Here's this property, nobody for miles around, and a big dry lake for a landing field. So far as that goes, they wouldn't even have to land — they could parachute the stuff, and there wouldn't be any chance of losing it on a big open space like that dry lake."

"I see, all right," Ivy said, "but what does it mean?"

Some of the excitement ran out of Dex's face, leaving it thoughtful. Just what did it mean to them? Elmo Farrity was running dope into the country. McLeen and Zolweg were working something behind his back, and Settlander had been mixed up in it too. But none of it could be proved. None of it was linked to the murders of Alford Duquesne and Jennie Chanslor, nor pointed to who killed them. Nor why. It was a setup to run narcotics into the United States, and that was all.

Later it was hard to remember what they did with all the time; but, if anything, it passed too quickly. They idled through most of the days, reading, talking, going for walks before the sun got too hot in the morning. The routine of daily living — cooking, eating, washing dishes and clothes, seemed enough to do; that, and the mere fact of being together. It was a strangely happy time.

By the time the third week rolled around, they were down to tuna, asparagus and peaches, and plenty tired of them. Their names had dropped out of the newscasts; and Dex decided that now as as good a time as any to make their move. They stayed one day longer to dye Ivy's hair. Then they packed up and left.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

"You drive the Jeep," he told Ivy. "I'll follow in the Ford."

"Are we taking both cars?"

"No, but I want to ditch the Ford where they won't find it for a while."

"That's a good idea."

He followed the station wagon for a good ten miles, then he tapped the horn, and Ivy stopped.

"Follow me now."

"All right."

Dex took the Ford straight out across the desert, brush dragging at the underbody, rocks and gullies making the old crate buck like a bronco. At the end of a half mile or so they came to the edge of a fifteen-foot drop-off with a sandy wash below it. Dex backed away fifty feet, put the Ford in low gear, pulled out the hand throttle, opened the door, let out the clutch, and when the car was rolling, he stepped out.

The Ford landed with a crash and a bang, rolled over, and stopped upside down. The motor ran a moment longer, wheels spinning slowly, then it choked and died.

He walked back to the Jeep. Ivy said, "You want to drive?"

"No, you take it. I just thought of something."

While she drove, he worked at rearranging their load so there was a hollow place where he could lie with the tarp over him. The cops would be looking for a blonde girl and a dark man. A dark-haired girl in a Jeep station wagon alone would have a better chance of getting past.

Finally the Jeep came to the intersection of the road with the highway. "Which way, Dex?"

Dex said, "South, toward Yuma, then east after you hit Highway 80."

He crawled under the tarp and pulled it over him so everything was covered but his head. Even in the comparative cool of the morning it was hot under there. The afternoon was going to be rugged.

Just outside of Yuma they cut east on Highway 80, the main east-west artery in that part of the country. And after that Dex had to spend most of his time under the tarp, for even in summer the traffic is brisk on that highway. It was hot, and it got hotter. Dex was wringing wet, and swilling water by the quart, but he stuck it out. Driving into the outskirts of Phoenix, Ivy said, "The thermometer on that billboard reads a hundred and ten."

"It's a hundred and eighty under here."

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"How do I get through Phoenix?"

"Watch the signs for the junction with Highway 60. Take Highway 60 east."

They drove for a few minutes, then the Jeep's ride began to get an odd feel to it, and Dex got a sinking sensation inside him. Almost immediately a bumping sound began, and Ivy pulled to the curb.

"Dex, we've got a flat tire."

"Where are we?"

"On Van Buren Street. There are motels and stores all up and down the street."

Dex groaned. Van Buren, that was the main line in Phoenix; and there they were right in the middle of the swanky motel district with traffic streaming by in both directions. You might know the tire would pick a place like that to let go.

There was nothing to do but get out and change the tire himself. Ivy watched until there was a break in traffic, then he slid out from under the tarp. After the tarp, even the hundred and ten degree heat felt cool. But not for long.

"How long will it take, Dex?"

"Five — ten minutes."

"There's a drugstore a couple of blocks ahead. I need some things. Would it be safe, you think?"

"As safe as standing here. Go ahead."

"I'll be right back."

Dex partly unloaded the Jeep, swapped the tires, and loaded everything back in seven minutes flat. Ivy wasn't back yet, but you couldn't blame her for dawdling a little in a refrigerated drug store. Dex got back into the station wagon; and that's when he heard the chilling sound of a siren coming fast from behind him. He was almost certain it wasn't for him. But when you're on the lam, he thought, a sound like that can send a cold tickle along your spine on the hottest day Phoenix ever saw.

The siren — it was a police car — wailed past without slackening speed, and Dex relaxed. The police car went two blocks further, then the driver hit the brakes, and it skidded to a stop.

Squarely in front of the drugstore where Ivy was.

Dex was paralyzed. For a time he couldn't even breathe. The cops, two of them, got out and went into the drugstore. Dex sat stunned for he knew not how long; then the cops came out with someone — a figure in blue jeans and white shirt — between them. The three of them and another man in civilian clothes got into the police car, it made a U-turn, the siren started to wail again, and the police car passed Dex again, picking up speed.

And Ivy was in the back seat between one cop and the civilian. Her face was pale and set, and she didn't give Dex the faintest flicker of attention as

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the car went past. Then it was gone, the sound of the siren dying in the distance.

It was incredible — how could it possibly have happened? Dex sat there dazed for minutes before he recovered presence of mind enough to start the motor and get out of there. He drove blindly until he reached a wide place beside the road, high on the mountainside, then he stopped. Below him and miles away Phoenix lay sprawled in the Salt River Valley.

And somewhere in it was Ivy.

How could it possibly have happened so quickly, Dex kept asking himself. And at six o'clock he got his answer. On the radio.

It was fantastic. One of those incredible stunts — one percent brains and ninety-nine percent sheer luck — that cops sometimes pull off.

That civilian had been a California cop headed east on his vacation; but he wasn't even from San Diego. He was an Orange County Sheriff's Deputy, and he'd only stopped at the drugstore for a pack of cigarettes and a Coke. He'd been sitting at the fountain with his Coke, when he glanced in the fountain's mirror and Ivy caught his eye. Something about her jogged his memory. Then she'd sat right beside him and ordered a milk shake, and he had a few minutes to study her in the mirror. She was abnormally uneasy under his stare, finally got up, leaving her milk shake unfinished, then it hit him — who she was.

Just like that.

The newscaster went on to say that Dex Nolan, the missing ex-policeman sought for questioning in two murders, might still be in the Yuma area of Arizona even though Ivy Settlander had denied they were traveling together, but roadblocks had been set up on all highways leading out of Phoenix. Dex Nolan was believed to be armed and dangerous.

Dex sat blindly staring down at Phoenix. What did he do now?

One thing sure: he couldn't stay perched up on that mountainside forever. It was almost dark when he started the Jeep and drove back down the mountain. At the bottom, he stopped, studied some maps; and instead of heading for Phoenix, he cut south on the unpaved roads. He soon realized he was lost, but all he had to do was to keep bearing south, and sooner or later he'd have to cut Highway 84 which led to Tucson.

He turned west on Highway 84; and when he got to Gila Bend, he filled up on gas, oil, and water. It was a risk, but he had to take it. The old man at the service station seemed half asleep, apparently gave Dex not even a second glance. And while he waited, Dex got out the map with the road to Settlander's land on it, and he studied it.

It was almost daylight again when Dex Nolan reached the sandy side road flanked by two big boulders newly painted white, which the map said was the road to the dry lake.

Dex turned off onto it.

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As Ivy had said, the country was much the same as the area where they had been holed up — just a little more barren, a little hotter, less mesquite, and more greasewood.

The sun was well up and getting hot by the time he rolled over a final rise and the valley with the dry lake was spread out below him. It was a big, shallow sink, low irregular mountains on three sides and the rise where he was on the fourth; and it looked roughly six or seven miles across. The dry lake bed in at the bottom of the sink was so white with alkali that it looked like an oval snowfield about a mile long; and it was as level as any dance floor.

A newly painted sign beside the twin track of the road said:

PRIVATE PROPERTY
ROAD CLOSED BEYOND THIS POINT
KEEP OUT

Dex drove on past the sign down to the dry lake, and there were tire tracks criss-crossing the hard grainy alkali surface — the cleated tire tracks of another Jeep. He circled the edge of the lake and there were no other tracks rising out of it.

That ended the exploring. There was nothing to do now but sit. Dex drove back to the canyon where there was some shade.

That night the radio said Ivy had been taken to San Diego by the police. And she hadn't told them a thing. Not where she had been, nor with whom, nor how she got to Phoenix, nor where the hundred thousand dollars was. Not a thing. And she was in plenty of trouble. The insurance company had signed a complaint against her; and the radio didn't give the figure bail had been set at, but it would have been enormous. So she was still in jail.

Dex Nolan got one break. The weather cooled off. And if it stayed cool, he estimated he had water and food enough for almost a week. At the end of that time he'd make up his mind one way or the other.

On the third night the radio said Ivy was out on bail. Dex knew there was only one place where she could have raised that kind of money — Elmo Farrity. He thought about that and he didn't feel good at all.

On the fourth night the radio said Ivy had a new attorney — Garry Weisler, the well-known Los Angeles criminal lawyer, who didn't lose a case once in a blue moon. With him handling her case she had a chance, maybe a good one or he wouldn't have taken the case. And Dex knew who was paying Garry Weisler.

On the fifth night the radio said Ivy's new lawyer had made a statement to the press — Ivy's defense would be based on a "lapse in memory." The shock of finding her husband a suicide had temporarily unbalanced her so that she couldn't remember a thing of what happened that night. She had

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intended no fraud with the insurance company, and now that she had her memory back she was returning the money. It was rumored that the insurance company might withdraw the complaint they had signed against her.

Dex stared at the cosmetics case with the hundred thousand dollars; and he knew who was putting up the hundred thousand for Ivy even before the announcer said: "Mrs. Ivy Settlander and Elmo Farrity, San Diego businessman, today applied for a marriage license."

And suddenly Dex was back in Paula's apartment that evening, and her words were in his ears: "*I know her . . . when the chips are down only one person counts — Ivy . . . whether she loves you or not, if she sees a chance to get out — even at your expense — she'll take it . . . don't go out on a limb for her . . .*"

Don't go out on a limb for her — that was a laugh — and Dex discovered he was laughing softly, crazily.

How could she do it? *How could she do it?*

It was shortly after that that he became aware of a sound in the night. A distant whining sound, familiar, because it was the same sound his Jeep made when it was pulling hard in low gear. Someone was coming along the road to the dry lake. There were two headlights about three miles away, coming over the rise into the valley.

Dex got the gun from the Jeep. It was the gun he'd taken away from Farrity's hood, and there were eight big .38 slugs in it.

The other Jeep crawled to where the fork would be, and turned. Downward. Toward the lake. Dex put the gun in his pocket.

He watched the lights wind down the slope to the level of the lake and stop there. Then a powerful spotlight winked on, was pointed straight up in the air. After that nothing happened for about thirty minutes, then there was the low droning of a plane in the southeast. The spotlight began to move in an arc in that direction. The sound of motors grew to a full-throated roar, the red and green winking lights on the wing tips came into sight and presently the twin-engined plane swept overhead in the light of the rising moon.

The spotlight held it, and Dex could see the white blossom of a parachute.

The plane went on past, the sound of it dwindling in the direction of Los Angeles. The spotlight held the parachute — a small one — in its light all the way down to the dry lake. Then the Jeep rolled across the lake to pick it up. It circled around, came back to the road, and disappeared over the rise, headed back to the highway.

Dex Nolan stood looking after it.

That would have been Ansel McLeen in the plane; but who had been driving the Jeep? And something else occurred to him — what was the date? He counted back in his mind. June 25th. The third date pencilled on Winston Settlander's map. Would it have been Sam Zolweg in the Jeep?

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No, Sam Zolweg had said he'd be waiting at the Gregshaw Hotel, under the name of Arnold Pender. Then who? What did it matter who was in the Jeep? Dex thought about a typed suicide note with a left-handed signature.

And just like that, his brain that had been like a piece of wood ever since the day Ivy had been picked up, suddenly started to work again. The facts started to fall into place; and that's when it hit him — this hot, smoking idea that had been waiting all along for something to trigger it.

Feverishly he checked it with every fact he knew — what Ivy had told him, what Paula had said, the alibis people had and didn't have. The suicide note still didn't fit, and one alibi didn't fit — *hell, that wasn't an alibi, it only looked like an alibi!* That left only the suicide note to explain, and he could lay that aside for the time being. The rest of it was right. He'd have bet his life on it.

He knew the name of a murderer!

Bur proof. You have to have proof. And suddenly he had the answer.

It's a long shot, he thought. But who are you to balk at long shots at this stage of the game? Get going, man.

Get going.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

DEX NOLAN WAS DRIVING FAST. Faster than either the road or the Jeep were made for. He was off the seat as much as he was on it, but he didn't slacken speed, for the idea was like a fever in him now.

It might work. It had to work.

He should have been paying more attention to his driving. He was slamming down a rocky ravine, scarcely wider than the Jeep; then the tracks made a slight bend and, as if from nowhere, a boulder appeared in his headlights.

The left front wheel crashed into the boulder, knocking it ahead of it, almost sending Dex through the windshield, then the Jeep was stopped.

Dex sat there a moment, breathing hard, then he got out. That boulder hadn't been there the day he came in. The other guy had passed this way. He must have seen Dex's headlights and —

For a second, in the sudden crashing of sound, Dex had a crazy notion that his Jeep had blown up; then he realized that it was a gun that somone back of the next turn was emptying at him.

Something socked him hard in the ribs, then he was diving, scrambling in the narrow ravine to get back of the Jeep. Finally back of it, crouched, he yanked out his gun, but the firing had stopped. Dex could hear the quiet

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sound of a motor idling not far away.

That would be the other man's Jeep.

The headlights had been shot out of Dex's Jeep, but suddenly he realized he would be visible in the red glow of the tail lights to anyone who might flank him from the top of the ravine.

But in the same instant, the quietly ticking motor of the other Jeep suddenly wound up in a roar. There was the sound of tires spinning gravel, then catching as the other Jeep pulled away.

Dex came around his Jeep, moving fast. He ran ahead on the road, and he could see the tail lights now, going away. He fired five shots after them.

They kept going.

Dex went back to his Jeep. His ribs were starting to hurt now. And now he felt the warm stickiness inside of his shirt.

He got the flashlight. The left side of his shirt was wet with blood down to his belt. He opened his shirt, and his side was hurting more by the second, as the numbness wore off. The wound was just below his left nipple, and Dex stared at it dazedly. Then he spotted another bullet hole farther back, near the armpit. Had he been hit twice? Then he realized how lucky he'd been. The slug had entered at an angle, skated along the ribs, and come out farther back. And he saw now that the misshapen bullet had fallen down between his shirt and his belt. He fished it out. For a couple of seconds he felt lucky. He saw the glint of a brass cartridge case, the kind used by a Luger — on the ground, picked it up and put it in his pocket.

Then the pain sunk its teeth in him, and he quit thinking about anything else.

He found the first aid kit in the Jeep, and he taped a clumsy dressing over the two bullet holes. The red came right through the bandage, but Dex didn't figure it to be a serious wound. The bleeding ought to stop after a while.

The Jeep, not him, was the real casualty.

Dex tried to figure his next move. The highway wasn't far away. But who would pick up a bloodstained hitch-hiker at night without reporting it promptly to the cops? So the highway was out.

He listened and he could hear the rumble of a train slowing down somewhere near. That would be his best bet.

Somehow he managed to walk to the train and haul himself and the cosmetic case with the money on board.

Dex lay there, bracing himself as best he could against the jounce and sway of the freight; and long before he got to Yuma, he had the thing planned out in his mind.

But there was still one detail he couldn't fit into what he knew. That suicide note.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

DEX MANAGED TO JUMP off the train at Yuma. But in jumping, he'd fallen badly and opened his wound again. The cosmetic case had flown open, scattering the money over the embankment near the highway. And it was ten minutes before Dex could collect it all, stuff it back in the case, tape the case together and take a deep, painful breath.

He stood in the dark night at the side of the highway, and watched the cars go by. A little distance west of him were the lights of a roadside cafe, a truck stop with three trucks parked in the big cleared space to one side of it.

He studied the trucks. One was loaded sky high with baled hay. Another was a big cross-country van, buttoned up tight with no way to get in. And the third was a dump truck with the name of a San Diego contractor on it. Dex studied the tires of the dump truck. By the set of them, the dump truck must be empty.

Inside the cafe, he could see the drivers at the counter talking to the waitress, and she was laughing at something.

Dex Nolan waited for a break in the traffic, while the siren died away to nothing, then his moment came. He threw the money case into the dump truck as he jumped, one foot on the big tire and his right hand grabbing for the top of the body. But he had to use his left arm before he could swing over the top and into the empty body of the truck; and even as he fell, he knew from the scalding pain in his side that he'd pulled the wounds open again. It was minutes before he could unclench his teeth and draw a deep breath.

And the damned money case had broken open again. After the truck was under way, he taped it shut again.

It wasn't daylight yet when the truck rolled into San Diego, but it soon would be.

The driver made a boulevard stop, and Dex bailed out.

He made a better landing that time. He didn't fall down. The money case didn't fly open. But the warm wetness was moving down his side again.

He had no coins to operate a pay phone, and with all this blood on him he didn't dare go anywhere to break a bill or call a taxi. He started walking.

It was a good thirty blocks, a lot of it was uphill, and the faint gray of dawn was streaking the sky by the time he got there. He stood on the front porch of Paula's house, and he was bathed in clammy sweat, trying to keep

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his hard breathing shallow to ease the fire in his side, and his knees were ready to buckle.

Paula was a long time answering the bell.

"It's Dex," he said. "Let me in, kid."

The door swung open and Paula stood in it. Her eyes widened at the blood on his clothes, and she drew a sharp breath, but all she said was, "What happened to you?" and her voice was oddly expressionless.

"Somebody took a shot at me."

"Who?"

"I don't know. Somebody out on the desert."

"How badly are you hurt?"

"I've had it worse. But I'm pretty tired."

"I told you not to come back here."

Tired as he was and with that fire blazing in his side, it took a while for the meaning of that to soak in. He lifted wondering eyes to her face. Her steady eyes met his as if from a great distance, and there was no softening in them for him.

She said again, "I told you not to come back."

"I remember."

"I meant it."

He stood a moment longer, then he turned away. "All right, Paula."

"Wait," she said. "Where are you going?"

"I've got one chance to pull out of this mess. A long one, but I've got to try it."

"Whether I help you or not?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I call the police?"

"Paula —"

"Get inside." Her voice was harsh. "Before I change my mind."

She stood aside and he went in. As she closed the door behind him, he started to sit on the sofa, and she said sharply, "Not there. Go in the bathroom where I can look at that wound."

Dex made his legs carry him that far. He folded down the top of the toilet and sat on it, so tired he almost toppled over. He leaned back, his eyes shut, and waited for Paula. She was a long time coming.

"All right, let's get that coat and shirt off." Her voice was cold and impersonal again. Dex opened his eyes and her face held the same expression.

Quickly, expertly she got the coat and shirt off. She peeled off the bandage, studied the wound, and said, "How long ago did you get this?"

"Several hours."

"Here." She put a thermometer into his mouth. She felt the pulse in his wrist, and she said, "It's not good. You need a doctor."

"Later," Dex mumbled around the thermometer. "Right now I've got a

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job to do. Tape this thing up tight to stop the bleeding, and I'll get going."

She didn't argue. She went to work with what she had — antiseptic, bandage and tape — and Dex leaned back, his eyes closed, a detached part of his mind busy again at the plan.

"That wound needs to be cleaned properly," she said in a flat professional voice. "You've lost a lot of blood, and you're suffering from shock whether you know it or not. You may keel over any minute."

"I'll last."

"It's your risk," she said, shrugging like a nurse dealing with a balky patient. Then she looked at him and her mouth tightened. "You picked an odd time to return to San Diego."

"What do you mean?"

"Haven't you heard? Ivy and Elmo Farrity were married yesterday."

He hadn't thought it would hit him so hard. For a moment he couldn't say anything, but finally a voice that didn't sound like his said, "But they only took out the license yesterday."

"They decided three days was too long to wait. They flew to Yuma and back yesterday afternoon. This is their wedding night."

It wasn't like Paula to twist the knife this way. She was watching him, and there was something hard, almost cruel in her eyes.

"Did you come back," she asked, "to try and stop it?"

"No."

"I told you Ivy always landed on her feet," Paula said. "Don't you think it's about time you forgot her?"

"Yes."

"And started thinking about yourself?"

"Yes."

"Dex —" uncertainty touched her cold voice. "Do you mean that?"

"I mean it."

"Do you still have that hundred thousand dollars?"

"In the cosmetics case."

"Then you still have a chance." She was looking at him, an odd conflict showing in her face, then she seemed to decide something. She said quickly, "I know enough surgery to clean that wound. I can get the instruments at the hospital, and the antibiotics too. You're a healthy brute; with luck you'll be on your feet in a week —"

"I haven't got a week."

"Shut up and listen," she said fiercely. "When you're able to travel, we'll get you out of the state, perhaps out of the country, and —"

"We, Paula?"

"Yes, we. Somebody has to help you."

"Paula," he began humbly, "I —"

"Now don't thank me," she said harshly. "I know I'm a fool, and I'll

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probably have to pay for it — more than I already have. So don't talk about it."

"All right."

"Now we'll get you to bed."

Dex shook his head. "I've got a job to do."

"You'd fall over before you could get out of the house."

Dex shook his head stubbornly. "I feel stronger now. I've got to get going."

"*Dex, listen to me!*"

"I want to borrow your car. If this thing backfires, you tell the cops I stole it."

She stood staring at him, and as he watched anger and exasperation ran out of her face leaving it dull and a little pale. "You don't really believe you have a chance of pulling out of this jam?"

"It's a gamble."

"Only that? And you're going to risk it?"

"Yes."

Her eyes searched his face, and what she saw there drove all hope out of her face. "All right," she said.

"If you'll give me the keys —"

"I'll drive you."

"No —"

"I'm driving, and that's final. You're going to keel over sooner than you think. If it's soon enough, I can bring you back here where you'll be safe."

He was too tired to argue. He had lied about feeling stronger. He knew he ought not to involve Paula further, but he was just too damned tired.

He said, "Help me back into my shirt and coat."

She did that silently, then said, "It won't take me a minute to dress."

And while she dressed Dex went into the living room, looked up a number in the telephone directory, and dialed it. A sleepy voice said, "Gregshaw Hotel."

Dex made his voice rough and a little bored. "This is the police. Sergeant Lefke speaking. Do you have an Arnold Pender registered there?"

The clerk said in his ear, "Yes, sir. He checked in last night. Room 714."

"I see. Now look up some other things for me. Was this Arnold Pender registered at your hotel on two other dates — May 3rd and June 1st?"

"Just a moment, Sergeant."

Dex waited, then the clerk said, "Yes, sir. He was here both of those dates."

The night clerk said, "Something wrong, Sergeant?"

"Nope. Routine check. But if you tell Pender anything about it, I'll have the hide off you, Mister."

"You can trust me, Sergeant."

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"Much obliged." Dex hung up.

He leaned back in the chair and let his eyes close. The fact that Zolweg was in town checked with the other facts he knew. But from here on it would be pure guesswork, plus whatever pressure he could bring to bear. Pressure. He opened his eyes, and looked up another number in the directory.

He dialed it, and this time the phone was answered by the bass voice of the big butterball who worked for Elmo Farrity.

Dex used the same rough, bored voice he'd used on the clerk. "Put Farrity on."

"Who is this?"

"The police."

It took a while, then Elmo Farrity's voice said grumpily, "All right, Sergeant. What is it?"

"Not Sergeant. It's Dex Nolan. Did you know that Sam Zolweg is in town?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Your Seattle market. He's registered at the Gregshaw Hotel under the name of Arnold Pender."

"So what?" But there was a change in Farrity's voice.

"So you've been had. A big fat doublecross. Zolweg is in town to pick up a shipment of junk. And not from you either."

"Are you crazy?"

"I'll be over to your place shortly. You send one of your hoods down to the Gregshaw Hotel and pick up Zolweg. He's in room 714."

"Listen, you show your face around here, and I'll sick the cops—"

"No, you won't. You'll get Sam Zolweg over to your place and wait for me. There's a lot of dough at stake. Your dough. And there's another thing. Settlander wasn't a suicide."

"What!"

"He was murdered. String along with me, and you'll get your hundred grand back and another hundred to go with it. Now how about it Farrity?"

Elmo Farrity didn't answer right away. Finally he said, "The crack about the cops still goes. But I'll listen to what you have to say first."

"Sit tight. I'll be there." Dex hung up.

After a while Paula came into the room, and she was wearing a green sweater, gray skirt and low-heeled shoes. "Where are we going?"

"Ansel McLeen's place."

Surprise showed in her face. "Is he mixed up in this?"

"We'll see. Know where he lives?"

"No, but I can look it up."

"Never mind. I remember now. All two's. Two-twenty-two Talcon Place. Let's go."

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THEY RODE FOR a while, made several turns, climbed a hill, then the car stopped. Dex opened his eyes. They were parked in front of Ansel McLeen's apartment, and the first thing Dex saw was the red Jeep parked in front of them. It was very dusty.

Dex said, "You stay here. I'll be back."

For a moment there was a rebellious look in her angular face, then she said, "All right."

Dex got out. He looked at the apartment house, and a suddenly startled look crossed his face. He half turned back toward the Nash, then changed his mind. He walked over to the Jeep, and felt its radiator. It was faintly warm. He looked at the back end, and there were two bullet holes in it. Not bad shooting, in the dark, with the other guy's slug already in him.

Dex started up the steps and now he felt steadier, stronger. Perhaps the sight of those bullet holes had done that.

He knocked on the door, and it opened almost immediately with Ansel McLeen standing in it. Dex pulled his gun, a strange glitter in his eyes now. "Back inside, McLeen."

He backed inside, and Dex followed, kicking the door closed with his heel; and keeping far enough away from McLeen to discourage any idea McLeen might have of jumping him. McLeen was wearing a maroon satin dressing gown over paisley pajamas. His hair wasn't mussed, and he didn't look like he'd been asleep.

"What the hell is this, Nolan?"

"The end of the line. For you. Walk ahead of me. With your hands up. Through every room in the apartment."

"But — but —"

"Get going. And don't think I won't use this gun if I have to."

One look at Dex's face seemed to convince McLeen, for he turned and walked through the apartment with Dex behind him. Except for them, it was empty. And Dex didn't see what he was looking for.

McLeen said, "What's the big idea, Nolan?"

"The idea is that Jeep of yours downstairs with two of my bullets in the back of it."

McLeen's eyes widened, but he said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"And tell me it wasn't out on that dry lake bed tonight when you flew over and dropped a bundle by parachute. Where is that bundle?"

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"Now listen —"

"Into that closet."

"Now wait a minute."

"Buster," Dex said softly, "I'd as soon put this slug in you as look at you."

"Sure, and wake up everybody in the building."

"I'm on the tail end of a long shot now. If it has to end this way, you're going to walk into hell ahead of me."

McLeen looked at the crazy glitter in Dex's eyes, and without a word, he walked into the closet, and Dex locked it behind him.

Then Dex searched the house.

It was in McLeen's dresser drawer. A package not much bigger than a cigar box, and inside it some carefully wrapped tins. Dex opened one, and looked at the white powder. Heroin. If it was pure — and it looked pure — it was probably worth between one and two hundred thousand dollars. Wholesale. Dex hated to think what it would bring, cut and marketed by the shot.

He went back to the living room, and unlocked the closet. McLeen walked out, and he seemed to have got some of his guts back while he'd been locked in the closet. He looked at the package Dex held, then at the blood on his clothes and the gun in his hand, and he managed a pretty fair sneer. "My story will be that you brought the package with you, Nolan."

"We'll see if Elmo Farrity will buy it."

That wiped the sneer off completely.

He said, "Who is the other half of the team?"

"What team?"

"Stop stalling. You flew the plane. Who used your Jeep to pick up the stuff?"

"You brought that stuff with you."

"Who's your partner?"

"Go to hell."

Dex took two steps and hit him on the side of the head with the gun barrel. McLeen flopped forward, grabbing his head, grunting like a horse that's spurred hard.

Dex said harshly, "Who was it?"

"Christ," McLeen mumbled shakily, "you can kill a guy that way."

Dex knew he wasn't going to get it out of him this way. For one thing, Dex didn't have the strength left. For another, McLeen had nothing to gain by talking. One way there was a chance Dex might beat him to death; but if he spilled everything he knew, then he'd land in the gas chamber for certain. McLeen had had time enough in the closet to figure it out.

Dex said, "Who put up the money for that plane of yours?"

"Who says anybody did?"

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"You got out of the Air Force with a hundred bucks and one suit of clothes. Elmo Farrity put up that dough, now didn't he?"

"Hell, I guess that's no secret." McLeen was still sitting on the floor, rubbing his head.

"You made a flight last night. From Mexico."

"All right," McLeen said in a sore voice, "so I made a flight. So what? I average one or two a week. So what? It's legitimate business."

"That's better. Now we're going for a ride."

McLeen walked out of the apartment ahead of Dex, and they walked down the stairs.

Then Dex was inside the Nash, with McLeen trying to squeeze farther away from him on the back seat. "Get going," Dex told Paula.

"Where to?" She sounded as scared as McLeen, but the car was already rolling.

"Elmo Farrity's place. You know the way?"

"Yes."

He didn't have the strength left to knock any admissions out of this guy, but he knew somebody who could. If Dex could work it right.

Meanwhile, if there were only some way he could fit that suicide note logically into the pattern the other facts made . . .

Just hold on a little longer.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE OVERCAST WAS already breaking up by the time they got to Elmo Farrity's place on the mountainside overlooking La Jolla.

"Get out," Dex said to McLeen.

He climbed out without a word.

Dex said, "Stay here, Paula."

Paula didn't speak either, but she got out of the car; and the look on her face said she was going any place Dex did.

They were expected. The big albino butterball was on the other side of the iron gate; and when he saw Dex's gun, he rumbled, "What the hell?"

Dex handed the gun through the iron bars, he took it, then he opened the gate, his small reddish eyes taking in the blood on Dex's clothes. "What happened to you?"

"He's nuts," McLeen said. "The crazy bastard like to killed me. I'll —"

"Save it." The butterball hooked a big hand on McLeen's arm, spun him around and shoved him toward the house. "The boss is waiting."

Then Dex remembered the things in the car — the money and the dope

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— and he went back for them. They seemed very heavy now. The ground had an odd, mushy feel under his feet. He shook his head, and he followed the others into the big living room.

Elmo Farrity was there, wearing gray slacks and shirt and leather slippers, looking like an irritated Abraham Lincoln. A fat little frog of a man who would be Sam Zolweg watched them come in; he looked disheveled and unhappy, and the cold little eyes deeply folded in fat were very alert. Farrity's other hood, Marty, stood behind the chief's chair, looking dapper in his blue suit. Ivy was not in the room.

Dex had plenty of time to note all those things. In some peculiar way everything seemed to have slowed down — even the passage of time. It was like a slow motion movie. Dex looked at the room, gently rocking now, and somebody seemed to have turned off the movie's sound track. He could see Farrity's lips move, but no sound came out. The rocking got worse and suddenly, without too much interest, Dex realized he was going to fall. Somebody caught him — Paula, helped by the butterball — and they got him to a chair.

The butterball came back with something in a glass. Paula held it to his lips, he swallowed, and a small fire started to glow in his stomach. It was pleasant to have a fire some place besides in his side.

Suddenly the fog began to clear, and Paula's voice came through:

"We've got to get you to a doctor."

"No. But I could use some more of the pain-killer."

The butterball brought it, and Paula held it to his mouth. That was better. He said, "Farrity, you've been had."

"You said that on the phone."

"You've been had by Settlander. By McLeen here. By Zolweg."

"Now wait a minute —" Zolweg began in a squeaky voice.

"I haven't got a minute." Dex's voice, stronger now, overrode him. "This was the setup. Settlander was the dummy front for the importing business; and McLeen held the air freight company for you. Your name was never connected legally with either operation, which left you in the clear if anything went wrong. Pick up and delivery was handled by Marty or the butterball or whoever — that part doesn't matter. Zolweg was a customer or else he handled distribution in the northwest."

"Elmo," Zolweg squeaked, "I don't know a damned thing about this."

Dex's grin was crooked. "McLeen knew three things; and he put them together to make a lot of fast money. One: he knew where he could buy heroin on his own in Mexico. Two: he knew Settlander was jammed, but could still raise a considerable amount of cash on his house and boat and cars. Three: he knew where he could sell the heroin — to Zolweg — at a somewhat reduced rate, of course. So they set up a little three-cornered partnership behind your back. You interested yet?"

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Farrity said, "Go on."

"McLeen had no money of his own; and Settlander couldn't raise nearly as much as they needed. And Zolweg was too cagey to lay out any money until the junk was safely across the border and in his hands. So they had to break the deal down to three deliveries instead of one big one. Settlander's cash handled the first purchase in Mexico. It was delivered to Zolweg, and the cash from that sale handled a second and larger purchase in Mexico, and so on — like a three horse parlay, as you might say. How am I doing McLeen?"

Farrity said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"About this." The package of heroin was beside Dex on the chair; and now he sailed it across the room. It hit Farrity in the chest and fell to the floor.

Marty said, "Watch it, punk," then picked up the package and handed it to Farrity. Farrity unwrapped it, looked at what was inside, and lifted hard, cold eyes to McLeen.

McLeen talked fast: "Elmo, that's a God damned lie! This lunatic showed up at my apartment this morning with that package in his hand. He shoved a gun in my belly, and —"

Dex said, "Ask him if he made a flight last night."

"Hell no!" McLeen flared. "I haven't made a flight for a week. Not to Mexico."

Dex said, "Call the airport. In L.A. or wherever he usually lands."

Marty started out of the room.

McLeen stuttered: "This — this crazy guy has got me all confused. I — I meant it was a lie about the dope. Sure, I — I made a flight last night. But —"

Farrity said, "Where?"

"The — the usual place."

"Nobody told me about it."

"It — it was the Augustinian bunch in L.A. Just — just a legitimate run — some tropical fruit and — and seafood."

"Phone Augustinian," Dex said.

"God damn you, shut up!" McLeen yelled.

Farrity looked at McLeen. "You double-crossing son of a bitch."

Farrity turned those cold eyes on Sam Zolweg, and Zolweg made a gesture that said he'd had enough. He had sweated right through his shirt. Evidently he figured it was time to load it all onto McLeen.

He said, "It's true, Elmo. I never crossed anybody in my life before. But I let that smooth-talking bastard sell me on a deal behind your back. I — I know this finishes me in your organization. But I — I want you to know I played it straight down the line with you — right up to now. And I don't know a damn thing about who killed Settlander —"

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"Shut up."

Zolweg stopped talking with his mouth open on a word.

Elmo Farrity turned his eyes on Dex. "What's your stake in this?"

"I want out of the gas chamber."

"Go on."

"After he had Settlander's cash, McLeen decided a two-way split was too much. So he started figuring a way to eliminate Settlander. Then Settlander's right hand was smashed accidentally, and McLeen thought he saw an opportunity. I don't know why he decided on a half-smart stunt like a fake suicide, but he did. He shot Settlander, typed out a quick suicide note, scrawled a signature, and got out of there just ahead of Ivy. That way, McLeen who had started out without a dime of his own capital, almost wound up with a fat wad of cash. How much was it to have been, Zolweg?"

Farrity looked at Zolweg. "How much?"

"A hundred and sixty G's."

Farrity told Dex: "Go on."

"McLeen left your party before Ivy did. Maybe he phoned to be sure Settlander was home and would wait for him. Anyway, after he shot Settlander and rigged the suicide, Ivy's arrival drove him out of the house. He watched her through the window while she picked up the gun and note and left. That was bad. His little suicide setup was being ruined. He trailed her to the tavern outside El Cajon — perhaps hoping he could get the gun and note back; but more likely realizing that the fake suicide scheme had backfired into a pip of a blackmail setup. Later he saw the woman, Jennie Chanslor, come out with the bag with Ivy's initials on it. He watched her and Duquesne haggle over Duquesne's cut, and he tumbled to what had happened. He followed the woman to her home, but didn't contact her. Not yet. It was a swell blackmail setup, but two other people — Alf and Jennie — had cut themselves in ahead of him. Something would have to be done about that.

"Jennie put the bite on Ivy twice, each time for a thousand dollars, and Ivy paid. Then McLeen contacted Jennie, under an assumed name, and proved he knew enough to land her in jail. She was small time, and he probably scared the daylights out of her. Anyway, McLeen said he was dealing himself in. But as soon as he had his hands on the note and gun, he started to plan how to get rid of her.

"Meanwhile Duquesne, who had noted the license of Jennie's car, read of the murder and hired a detective to track it down. He hit Jennie for money to keep his mouth shut, and she told him to blackmail his own money out of Ivy. Which he did — clumsily, using his own name and asking for a check. Then I came into the picture. Duquesne figured I was a cop, and he told Jennie who relayed the information to McLeen. And McLeen suddenly realized his greed had led him into a very precarious position. If

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the cops threw the hooks to Duquesne and Jennie they were going to spill everything they knew. Jennie didn't know McLeen's name but she could describe him, and the cops might work it out from there."

Dex could feel the synthetic strength of the whiskey dying in him now. He had to finish this, and soon.

"McLeen had been trailing Ivy on the sly, and he knew about the cottage in Imperial Beach. He decided to hell with the blackmail; he had to save his own skin — got rid of Jennie and Duquesne, and fasten the blame on a logical suspect — Ivy. So he hatched a plan. He had Jennie phone Duquesne to meet her at the cottage, and if she was late to go in and have a drink while he waited. Then McLeen drove Jennie to the slough below Chula Vista and killed her with Settlander's gun. He left the poisoned whiskey in the cottage, and he was twenty miles away in La Jolla when Duquesne died."

"With Ivy!" McLeen burst out. "How could it be hung on Ivy if I was her alibi at the time?"

"That was the point of being with her. You were her alibi; you could withhold that alibi, and she'd be stuck."

There was nothing to do but go on.

Dex said, "After the fight we had at Ivy's place, McLeen had another bright idea. He stole my suitcase from the car. Maybe he could use it to further complicate the situation — the more confusion, the better for him. He drove back to the slough, muddied some of the clothes, put the gun and note in the suitcase, and the bottle of cyanide with the stopper loose so it'd leak out; then he put the suitcase in a locker at the bus depot. Then he went home and drank himself unconscious."

Something was wrong. Badly wrong. Farrity wasn't buying this at all.

"Do you know what time the woman and the bartender were killed that evening?" Farrity asked.

"The woman around eight o'clock, and Duquesne around nine-thirty."

Farrity made a restless gesture. "McLeen was with me from six until a quarter of eight. Marty saw him pick up Ivy at ten minutes to eight. Are you trying to say he made a forty-mile round-trip to Imperial Beach and back and did all the things you said in exactly five minutes?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

FOR A MOMENT THERE was complete silence.

McLeen hadn't killed them. It was the other person — the one who had made the pickup at the dry lake last night. The one who had smashed his Jeep and shot Dex.

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Suddenly Dex's mind grabbed at a fact; then, as it had last night, his mind started working again — clearly, logically, swiftly. And one fact which he finally understood, seemed to trigger the whole process of putting them together.

The faked suicide!

That had been the one illogical, improbable detail he hadn't been able to get around or over or under. It had seemed so unlikely that Settlander would have been killed that way, when there were so many simpler, almost foolproof ways.

But now Dex understood.

And he knew the name of the killer. But, as in the case of McLeen, who would believe him? And what proof did he have? None. To hell with proof — he still had McLeen. And McLeen knew the name too. He'd brought McLeen to Farrity in the first place, because he figured if he could nail McLeen with the double-cross, then Farrity would knock the rest of it — the murder part — out of him.

The answer was still pressure. But how was he going to get Elmo Farrity to apply it?

Dex looked at Farrity, and he said abruptly: "I don't give a damn if McLeen killed them or not."

Farrity's eyes narrowed, but he waited for Dex to go on.

"All I want is out of the gas chamber."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning I've done you a favor. And a big one, smoking out this double-cross. And dumping a hundred and sixty thousand dollars worth of dope in your lap. Not to mention the hundred thousand dollars insurance money. That's a quarter of a million bucks, Farrity, and I expect something in return.

"I didn't walk into this thing with my eyes shut. Everything I told you about the narcotics smuggling is written down and in hands which will see that it gets to the Treasury people if anything happens to me. Or if the cops catch me."

Dex could see Paula's eyes widen. She knew it wasn't so, but the rest of them didn't. And all eyes were on him now. Pressure. He was putting it on.

Dex's grin was hard and predatory. "I figured to sell you on McLeen; but either way I came to make a deal."

Farrity's eyes were half-hooded now. "Go on. Make it."

"I want McLeen to take the fall for all three murders. Innocent or guilty."

Dex said, "Set it up like this. You know nothing about narcotics. McLeen is only an acquaintance of yours. After all, there are no legal documents linking you to him. Your only interest in this is to see your wife's name cleared; and if McLeen goes up for murder, she is automatically cleared. McLeen can sing his head off to the cops, but he can't prove a thing. McLeen will

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have to be caught with a certain quantity of narcotics in his possession. And Zolweg with him — after all he can't expect to come out of that double-cross scot free — but for him it's just a prison sentence, not a murder rap."

Dex said, "McLeen can be given a shot of heroin to knock him out. Zolweg, driving McLeen's car with McLeen and some narcotics in it, gets picked up for speeding. He acts suspiciously, the narcotics are found, and Zolweg breaks and confesses the whole setup, including the fact that McLeen when drunk had boasted of the three murders. You hold back McLeen's alibi. Incidentally, Zolweg has an alibi for the times of the murders, hasn't he?"

Farrity looked at Zolweg, who made the same stiff nod, and said in his squeaky voice: "I was in Seattle during the last two. But my God, Elmo, ain't there no other way?"

Farrity looked back at Dex without answering. He wasn't sold. Not that tough, smart mug. Dex would have bet his life on it — he wasn't sold even a little bit. Farrity was just waiting to hear the whole improbable scheme, before he started poking holes in it.

But McLeen was buying it. He'd aged ten years in the time they'd been here. Gray-faced and shaking, he watched Farrity's hard face. And McLeen was Dex's pigeon.

"Elmo!" McLeen pleaded in a shrill voice, "don't listen to this guy!"

Elmo Farrity didn't even glance at him. He seemed deep in thought. Pressure. One more turn of the screw.

"I'll back you up," Dex said. "You won't be in my story at all. McLeen knocked off Settlander for his dough. He killed the other two to shut them up. That's all there is to it. I can vouch for Paula's silence. You can handle the rest of this gathering. Zolweg takes a prison rap on the narcotics charge — he's lucky to get off that easily. And McLeen takes the murder rap."

Dex leaned back in his chair, his face deeply lined and very tired now, but the eyes feverishly alive in it. "That's what I want for the quarter of a million bucks. How about it?"

"*God Almighty!*" McLeen yelled. "*You can't do that to me! I never killed anybody. I won't take the rap for it. If you think I'm going to the chamber for something she did, you're crazy. I'll tell you who killed all three of them — it was — Paula who killed them!*"

In the silence that followed, even Farrity's mouth fell open. Then he closed it with a snap, and the look he flicked at Dex Nolan was not without admiration; but Dex didn't see it because he was looking at Paula Kenzie.

And he could see the truth in her face.

McLeen said, "She killed them all! All three!"

"Shut up," she said in the same weary voice. "Dex already knew anyway. Didn't you?"

"Yes," Dex said.

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"How?" Paula asked in an oddly incurious voice.

"I finally saw the meaning of the fake suicide."

"And what was the meaning?"

"Hatred. Of Ivy. A faked suicide is always clumsy, but you had to have it. You didn't want Ivy to profit from her husband's death."

"It was a small thing," she said tonelessly, "to wreck the whole plan."

Dex looked at her, this woman he had known well, and long held in affection; and now she was as unreal as this mist that was gathering around him. Paula was a murderess. And the steps by which his mind had finally moved to that conclusion a few minutes ago were scarcely clear even to himself. Some were little more than disjointed phrases — Paula's words, heard in his memory:

". . . *Ivy? . . . of course I hate her . . . you don't know what it's like, being as ugly as I am . . . plastic surgery . . . I can dream about it. But that's all . . . cost more money than I could save in a lifetime . . . I've seen a lot of men die — good men, useful men, loved men . . . Settlander wasn't much — he was weak and vain and not even honest . . . he's dead and nobody misses him . . . A nurse's life is spent among misery and pain and death . . . a door in her mind she can close . . . I've always been able to do what I had to do . . . I'm a tragic and irretrievable fool . . .*

Irretrievable, because she had killed three people and nothing could ever change it. She must have been close to confessing that night. If her tears had come, she might have. "*I'm so ugly when I cry . . .*"

Her face was the blight under which her life had been lived, she had been driven and tortured by her ugliness until her need to escape from it became so desperate that even a human life was not too great a price to pay. "*I've always been able to do what I had to do . . .*"

What things? Things like her saying tonight that she didn't know where Ansel McLeen lived. Dex had told her the address, but in his fuzzy condition he'd told her wrong — 222 Talcon Place — yet she'd driven straight to the right place: 2222 Talcon Place. A small thing. A small thin thread that tied her to McLeen, and when you followed the thread you came to the narcotics and past them to Settlander, and you had a motive for her murdering him — half of a hundred and sixty thousand dollars that would buy a new face and open up a new world before her.

Dex had no way of knowing how long it took these things to run through his mind; for time was playing tricks on him now, just as his eyes were. To him it seemed a long time, although Paula had not moved, nor had anyone else spoken. She seemed waiting for his answer.

He said, "It doesn't matter how I knew."

"No."

McLeen found his voice: "It was all her idea! She heard me talking about it in my sleep — about the dope and all. She killed him. The others too —"

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"Shut up!" Paula said harshly.

"You and McLeen?" Dex said in a wondering voice.

"Why not? Why not me and McLeen?" There was strident anger in her voice now. "Maybe I was tired of pity. Even this scum treated me like a woman, which is more than you ever did. Oh, I know he did it because he thought of me as a freak. He gets his kicks that way —"

"She killed them," McLeen babbled. "I didn't kill anybody."

"*You fool!*" Paula blazed, a strange and terrible smile blooming on her face. "You think it matters that you didn't pull the trigger? You're my accomplice. Your guilt is equal under the law. *If we're caught, you'll occupy that other seat in the gas chamber!*"

"*I didn't* —" McLeen half yelled, then stopped with his mouth open on a word.

Paula had jumped to her feet, her hand dipping into her purse and coming out with a gun. A Luger. The Luger, Dex thought with his strangely detached mind, that had ruined his Jeep and put this hole in him.

Ansel McLeen shrank back, but the gun wasn't for him. It was pointed squarely at Elmo Farrity, and he was suddenly as still as stone. Behind Farrity the bushy-haired Marty had come to attention, his face taut. The butterball, in front of the fireplace, still had a piece of a smile on his little red mouth but it was artificial like something painted on his moon face.

Paula said to McLeen, "It's time to get out of here."

"That's right." The sight of the gun seemed to have knocked some of the panic out of him. "If we can get to my plane —"

"Get that green case at Dex's feet," Paula rapped. "And get the package of heroin. It's worth money."

"Yeah —"

"But first get those hoods' guns."

McLeen stood stalled a moment — the orders were coming too fast for him — then he sorted them out, and he took the guns off of Marty and the butterball who had finally stopped smiling.

"Ivy!" Paula yelled at the house. "Where are you?"

She started toward a door, passing in front of Farrity, moving quickly, the big Luger gripped in her fist, that merciless smile frozen on her face.

"*Ivy! Where are you?*"

Dex knew then what she was going to do, but there was no strength left in him; and even if there were, there still wouldn't have been time.

Elmo Farrity must have known too. For, as Paula passed in front of him, he lunged forward from his chair, hands grabbing for the gun. Paula whirled, snarling like a cat.

And shot him squarely in the face.

Paula sidestepped as his momentum carried him past her to sprawl face-down on the red tiles of the floor.

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It was the butterball who did the trick. The speed of his move was incredible. She was only a long step from him, and he made that step, grabbed the wrist with the gun, swung it up and around with a whipping motion, and the sound of the bone breaking was a small, muffled pistol shot of its own.

Paula screamed, the gun spinning out of her hand under the divan.

At this moment Ansel McLeen had been bending over to pick up the green leather case at Dex's feet. Dex kicked him in the face, and he went over backwards. And again it was the butterball — Dex was beginning to love that big albino — who spun Paula aside, and landed on Ansel McLeen like a safe coming out of a second story window.

The butterball got to his feet, and he had his painted smile back. McLeen was unconscious on the floor. The butterball got his gun from McLeen's hand, took Marty's gun from McLeen's pocket and tossed it to him.

"How bad is the boss hurt?"

"Are you kidding?" Marty's voice had a choked sound. "Look at the back of his head."

The butterball looked and nodded. Then he looked down at Paula sitting on the floor, holding her broken arm, her face white and dull with shock. The butterball bent to pick up the package of narcotics from the floor, and he said to Marty, "I think I'm getting out of here."

"I know damned well I am."

They left and Dex heard a car start up outside and drive away. Sam Zolweg had cleared out too, although Dex hadn't seen him go. Dex sat there in a strange foggy world of his own which, in some inexplicable way, wasn't connected at all to the room out there where Elmo Farrity lay dead, Ansel McLeen unconscious, and Paula's pain-filled eyes in a white face stared at him as from a great distance.

Then the haze seemed to thin a little, and he could see Paula's face clearly.

And while he looked, it changed. Some of the shock ran out of it, the eyes widened then narrowed, and all the wrongly angled features tightened again into that merciless, terrible expression as she stared at something past him.

Dex turned his heavy head, and he looked at Ivy standing in the doorway. Ivy in a pale blue negligee, her hair the color of dark honey, her face pale and still.

Then Dex looked back at Paula, and already she was scrambling on her knees toward the divan, her broken wrist dangling, her good arm under the divan, reaching, groping —

"Run, Ivy!" Dex's yell was a thin sound in his ears. "*Run!*"

Dex never knew where the strength came from. All he knew was that he was out of his chair, moving in a cloudy nightmare, and by the time Paula turned with the gun in her hand, he piled into her. Paula screamed and maybe he did too, for the pain was beyond anything he ever knew. It seemed to lift him and throw him ahead of it the way a breaking wave

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throws a piece of driftwood. But he got the gun. And he kept it.

Dimly he realized that Paula had pulled away and gotten to her feet, holding her broken arm tightly against her. Without looking at him or Ivy, she started for the front door.

Dex's voice called, "Stop, Paula."

"Go ahead," the harsh words came back over her shoulder, "shoot. I'd as soon it was you as the police."

Dex watched her go out the door, then he fumbled the gun into his coat pocket. He got slowly to his feet, turned, and only then saw that Ivy hadn't run. She hadn't moved.

There was the sound of a car starting outside, then Paula drove away. She wouldn't get far. Not with that broken arm.

Ivy watched him, not moving, her eyes large in her pale face. Dex could hear the faint sound of a siren coming up the hill. Perhaps Ivy had called them. Ivy looked very beautiful standing there in this hazy dream of his. Her husband lay dead on the floor. And she stood there, worth God knows how much money now. And very beautiful. Ivy the durable widow. Ivy who always landed on her feet. The golden widow.

Wobbling on his feet, Dex picked up the green leather case with the hundred thousand dollars in it; and now somebody was laughing, a soft, crazy sound. Then Dex realized the laughter was his own. He stopped it.

The case in his hand, he started the long, tricky course across that rocking floor; and, halfway across, he knew he wasn't going to make it. He threw the green case ahead of him, and the strange voice that was his called, "Wedding present — for you —"

And the floor started up to meet him.

But before it did, he had that one picture of her — the green case bursting open as it hit the floor, the money pouring out, a full green tide of money washing around her bare feet.

"*Ivy . . .*"

He never touched the floor, for a soft, black cloud caught him, and he fell into the cloud.

Endlessly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Dex Nolan's wound wasn't serious. Shock, exhaustion, and loss of blood had knocked him out; but after a couple of days in the hospital, they moved him to jail, and the police got at the business of straightening out the mess.

Paula was dead.

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She'd gotten as far as Torrey Pines; and half way down the Torrey Pines Grade her car had gone off the side of the mountain at an estimated hundred miles an hour. There had been no skid marks, no swerve in the tire tracks — Paula had passed judgment on herself.

Elmo Farrity, that methodical and business-like hoodlum, had made a tape recording of everything that had been said in his living room that Sunday morning. The police found the recorder when they broke into his office.

Which simplified things a lot.

Dex had seen Ivy twice in the four days the police held him; both times across a room crowded with cops, assistant D.A.'s, and Treasury agents. There had been a strange, lost look on her face, and the smoky eyes hadn't quite met his. No words had passed between them.

Finally, six days after that Sunday morning, the district attorney said he was satisfied, the T-men said they were too, hands were shaken all around, and Dex was a free man. Although he'd have to stick around town for McLeen's trial.

It was a warm, sunny morning when Dex Nolan walked out of police headquarters; and he stood a moment on the sidewalk.

"Dex —"a voice back of him said, and his face tightened to a mask.

Ivy wore a light blue suit and a hat trimmed in silver. For some reason Dex felt vague surprise to see her so little changed by all she'd been through. Sunlight glinted off the honey-blonde hair, and the face she showed him was lovely and unlined. She was even smiling, but it was an insecure smile, small and quickly fading under his expressionless regard.

"Hello, Ivy."

"They told me they were releasing you today."

Dex nodded.

Ivy said, "My car's right over here. Can I give you a lift?"

"I'm not going any place in particular."

"I — I want to talk to you."

"There's nothing to talk about."

"I think there is."

"All right," Dex said indifferently.

When they were sitting in the green Cadillac, Ivy hesitated, nervously picking at her gloves. "I — I don't know exactly how to say this so — so you'll understand. But I've got to try. He — Elmo — left a lot of money. More than a million dollars."

"I figured he'd be good for that much."

She looked searchingly at him, and his face was as neutral as his voice.

She said, "Money isn't clean or dirty, Dex. It's only money. I mean it's good or bad only according to what you do with it. I — I'm not saying this very well."

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"Sure."

"I waited there in jail, the days went by and there was no word of you. Finally I was convinced you had made good your escape, and I was glad, Dex. Truly I was. I wanted you to be free and have the money, even if it meant I'd never see you again."

"Ivy, this isn't getting us anywhere."

"Dex, I married Elmo Farrity because I was certain in my own mind that I'd never see you again. And if I couldn't have you, I didn't care who I married. I was alone, penniless, in jail, facing a long prison term for that insurance fraud. Elmo came to see me there in jail. He said he had loved me for a long time, and he still did. He wanted to marry me. If I'd marry him, he'd make the money good to the insurance company. And he'd get that lawyer, Garry Weisler, to handle my trial — and you know how many cases he loses.

"I — I was stampeded. Jail was a living nightmare. There aren't many good years in a life, Dex; and you can't waste them, because you don't get them back. I'd sit there in jail, thinking of the years ahead in prison, and I'd almost go crazy. It — it was like the thought of death itself. *Dex, I had to take Elmo Farrity's offer.*"

"Sure." But there was no expression in the word. Nor in his face.

"Dex, do you remember how it was — out there in the desert?"

Dex didn't look at her, nor answer.

"We — we had everything in the world for those few days. Can't you understand — can't you see, Dex — I'm the same woman I was then." There was sudden urgency in her voice: "Truly I am. Dex, look at me."

Dex looked at her, his face tightly held and neutral; and her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

But she went on: "If we'd made good our escape, we'd have had that wonderful life we planned, whether the murders were ever solved or not. Why couldn't it have been that way?"

"You loved me then, Dex. I loved you then, and I do now. And I am the same woman, Dex. *I am!*"

"Maybe," Dex said in an oddly muffled voice, opening the door to get out, "I'm not the same man."

She didn't say another word. She watched him get out and close the door after him. She watched him stand a moment on the sidewalk before he turned away, and the tears in her eyes were still unshed.

"Goodby, Ivy."

Dex walked slowly in the morning sun, his wooden face showing nothing of the hard give and take in his thoughts. Wanting her as badly as he did, he could no longer think straight with her sitting there telling him she loved him. And he knew he had to think this thing out correctly, or none of the rest of his life was going to be any good.

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Ivy had one thing straight. Life is short.

You can't throw away the good years, because you don't get them back. One day you turn around, and you've lived them all. And what have you got to show for them? Just some things that happened, and a few that might have happened — but didn't. Was that all there was to a life?

She said she never loved anybody but him.

Perhaps it was true. People can't help being what they are. And it's all right for you to say you're not the same man, but that doesn't make it so. Any more than you can kill a desire by not fulfilling it. Or fill an empty place with more emptiness.

And suddenly he knew something more certainly than he ever knew a thing in his whole life. And it had nothing to do with logic or right or wrong or anything, except what he was and what Ivy was.

"Hey," a man's voice at his side said, "aren't you Dex Nolan?"

"What?" Dex looked up blankly.

"I'm with the *Daily Chronicle*." He was a little wisp of a man with a voice like a rusty hinge. "How's about a story?"

"No story." Dex turned and looked back. Ivy was standing on the sidewalk, watching him.

"Any story will do. That city editor of mine — say, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing." A strange light was breaking on Dex's face.

"Even the story of your life will do."

"That's a long story," Dex said softly, starting back toward Ivy. "And it's only just beginning."

Ivy didn't come to meet him this time. And he understood that. This was one journey he had to make himself. She was crying, but she was smiling too.

And as he bent to kiss her, she whispered, "Welcome home, Dex Nolan."

THE END

A slightly expanded, hard-cover version of "Hang for Her," by Floyd Mahannah, will soon be released by publishers Macrae-Smith. Watch for it at your local bookstore.

Next month's thrilling issue of Mercury Mystery Book-Magazine will headline the full-length, original novel, "Hunt the Man Down," by William Pearson. It's the high-tension story of a woman who wanted her husband dead; the man who offered to kill him; and the victim himself, whose death in a fiery plane crash turned his wife's plot into a gruesome joke and sent a bitter young insurance investigator on a hunt that exploded into unexpected violence. Also in this issue will be "Killer on the Run," by Edward D. Radin; "The Man Who Beat the Income Tax," by James Running; plus other fact-crime tales, and shorter pieces.

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MYSTERY PUZZLE: Ski Lodge Murder

INSPECTOR GOLDSMITH HAD JUST returned from the slope to the Inn when the call came from Grayson.

"I hate to bother you on your week-end, but there's been a death here at my lodge — Bill Dugan — and wish you'd be in on it. It involves the problem we discussed."

Grayson had discovered embezzlement in his firm, and suspected two of his top employees. He had called in a private detective named Bill Dugan and introduced him to the two suspects as a personal friend. It sounded as though the detective had learned something, and been killed for it.

Grayson greeted the Inspector at the door, and led him into the large, beamed living room where he introduced him to Dave Briggs and Alan Wilhelm, the two suspects.

"The four of us came up here last night. When we returned from skiing this afternoon, we all came in here for martinis. Dave mixed them, over at the portable bar there, while I showed Dugan the guns on the wall at the other end of the room. Bill took his drink in one gulp, and collapsed almost immediately."

"I mixed them, right enough," Dave interjected, "but when I had them all poured out, I went out to the kitchen for crackers."

Alan said reluctantly. "I guess I was the only one near the drinks then. I remember my elbow bumped the tray, and it spun around like a top. The drinks spilled only slightly. I was wiping the tray off when Dave came back with crackers under one arm and nuts under the other."

"What did you do then, Dave?"

"Well, Inspector, I had these things under my arms, and I picked up the tray and passed it around. Alan first, since he was closest, then Mr. Grayson and Dugan. I put the tray and nuts and crackers on the coffee table there, we all toasted the snow — and Dugan collapsed."

Grayson confirmed Dave's story, adding, "He definitely could not have put anything in one of the drinks when he returned from the kitchen — I distinctly remember that his hands were never higher than the edge of the tray. And nobody was within five feet of Dugan after he picked up his drink."

"May I see all the glasses used?" the Inspector asked.

"Surely." Grayson pointed to the coffee table. The glasses were all the same, none chipped or marked.

"Did you have any olives, onions, or the like?"

Alan shook his head.

"I see," said the Inspector. "It seems as though no one person had the opportunity to poison Dugan's drink and make sure he got it, with the possible exception of Dugan himself. Since we have no reason to believe he had reason for suicide, and there *was* a motive for his murder, the answer seems obvious.

What did the Inspector mean? For solution, *see page 110.*

— J. A. KRIPPER

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DOCTORS IN CRIME

Ella May had been many things in her long life — sister of a beautiful actress; wife of a Chinese teashop proprietor, missionary and recluse. Now, in her seventies, sick, eccentric and suddenly an heiress, she was doomed to become the bride of "Doctor" Hjalmar Groneman — the bride of death . . .

THE HEALER AND THE DYING BRIDE

by Miriam Allen deFord

THE PLACE WAS THE BEDROOM OF an apartment on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown — an apartment stuffed with elaborate Chinese furniture, the walls covered with anatomical charts. The time was the night of September 10, 1935. The participants were an obese, very sick woman in her seventies; a very pale, very bald man, fiftyish, with deep-sunk eyes and high square forehead; a hard-faced young woman; and a muddled clergyman.

The occasion was a wedding.

The bride was the dying woman on the narrow single bed; she was in a high fever and only semi-conscious, rousing herself only to murmur the responses. Her name was Ella May Dayan, or Ella May Clemmons, or Ella May Wong, or perhaps even Ella May Overacker — you can take your choice. For her last days, it may have been Ella May Groneman.

The bridegroom was a drugless practitioner who sometimes called himself a chiropractor and sometimes a naturopath. Three years before, he had received a 30 days' suspended sentence for calling himself "Doctor" and for practising medicine without a license, and had been officially censured by the Board of Chiropractors. He was a widower with a grown son. His name was Hjalmar Groneman.

The hard-faced young woman was named Charlotte Enberg, and she had been installed by Groneman as Ella May's nurse, though she was not a nurse — she described herself as an artist. She was actually Groneman's mistress, and they had lived together for several years as Mr. and Mrs. Enberg. She was the only witness to the marriage, though California law requires two.

The clergyman believed that he

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was righting a wrong, uniting a sinful couple in holy matrimony. When California abolished common law marriage, an ordinance was passed to save the feelings of people who might have co-habited for many years and established families. By it, any adult couple with no legal impediments who have lived as man and wife may be married without a license by any minister willing to perform the ceremony. Groneman had told the clergyman that he and Ella May had lived together for three years. It was almost certainly not true: she was very ill all that time, she was old and had grown extremely Puritanical, the only bed in the apartment besides the single one on which she lay was a Chinese teak affair which had no mattress, and during the entire period Groneman had been living not on Stockton Street with Ella May but in the Mission District with Charlotte.

Moreover, Ella May was a converted and devout Roman Catholic, and a marriage by a Protestant minister would be to her no marriage at all. The week before, she had received extreme unction, the last rite of her church.

The minister left as soon as the ceremony was concluded. Before daylight, an ambulance ordered by the newly wedded groom arrived. Groneman had the driver park a block and a half away and turn out his headlights. He took the driver and his assistant on foot to the apartment, which now was completely dark, with the electricity turned off at the switch. There, by the flicker of flashlights, the sick woman was loaded on to a stretcher and carried out to the waiting ambulance, and then driven across the Bay (it was before the day of the bridge, and the trip was made on the earliest morning auto ferry) to Alameda.

That very day Groneman had rented a furnished apartment in this town south of Oakland, telling the landlady that his wife had had a nervous breakdown and that he wanted a quiet place where she could rest. The party reached the house before 6 o'clock on the morning of September 11. Miss Enberg was installed again as nurse. She did no nursing, and was not even a good keeper, for frequently she went out and left her patient alone and uncared for. Once she met the landlady at the front door, and remarked casually, "My patient is unconscious." She did not consider it necessary to explain why a nurse should leave an unconscious woman unattended. Another time the curious landlady heard a deep groan from the usually silent apartment. Miss Enberg explained that, later, before the grand jury. "She was allowed only liquid food, so she was always hungry and cried all the time," she said blandly.

Groneman came every evening after his office hours in San Francisco. By September 18, a week from the time of their arrival, Ella May

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fell into a coma, and it was obvious that she was moribund. Something had to be done fast to make sure of a death certificate — Groneman himself could not sign one. So he sent for a neighboring physician, who saw at once that there was nothing he could do, and ordered her sent to a hospital. Groneman had her taken to the Alameda Sanitarium, where he gave a false address, the machine shop of a San Francisco acquaintance, and described himself as a mechanic.

Ella May died the next day.

The doctor who had been called on the eighteenth signed the death certificate in a hurry. He was about to leave for Omaha for an extended trip. The cause of death was given as cholecystitis (inflammation of the gall bladder), jaundice, and uremia. By law the physician signing a death certificate must have been in attendance on the patient for at least twenty-four hours previous to death, which this doctor had not been; so to save trouble he gave the date of death as September 20 instead of the nineteenth, when Ella May really died. He took Groneman's word for it that the deceased had been a resident of Alameda for seven months, instead of the actual eight days.

Ella May was buried in a cemetery in nearby Hayward with none of her friends being notified of her death. Arranging for that bleak interment was not her new husband's first concern; he went straight from her deathbed to the Alameda apartment and tried to get a refund on the rent he had paid in advance. (He didn't get it.) He had already, five days before, had all the furniture removed from the Stockton Street apartment in San Francisco and taken to his and Charlotte's love-nest in the Mission District, to be sold. He did not bother to inform the landlady of this apartment house where Ella May had lived for five years; after hearing no sound from the apartment for several days, and knowing her tenant had been ill, she grew worried and used her passkey. She found the rooms completely stripped.

As soon as Ella May was buried, her bereaved widower turned up in a lawyer's office with a will, dated February 16, 1931, naming him as sole heir. He told the lawyer that they had been married for a year past. When he filed the will for probate it bore a codicil stating that he was the husband of the testatrix and that she was "a legal resident of Alameda." Her own lawyer later testified that she had told him she had made another will in 1935. But he had never seen it and it was never found.

This, of course, was the *raison d'être* of the whole ghoulish performance. Ella May, who shopped for her frugal meals with a market-basket over her arm, who sometimes sold newspapers on the street-corners in Chinatown, was an heiress. In 1930 her only sister, who was the estranged wife of Howard Gould,

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son of the multimillionaire Jay Gould, had died in Lynchburg, Virginia. Just how much Katherine left to Ella May has never been determined. There was a trust fund of $11,000 which was to be paid out at the rate of $250 a month, and that, by 1935, was down to $3000. But there was also a legacy in real estate, which has been valued at from $40,000 to $80,000.

The story that led to that macabre wedding and its aftermath began some time in the early 1870s in Oakland, California.

There two little girls named Ella May and Viola Katherine Dayan lived with their mother and their stepfather, who was a bookkeeper for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Their own father's name was Clemmons, but in childhood they used their stepfather's. Not much is known about their early uneventful careers. The first certain glimpse is in the 1880s, when Ella May, still almost a child, was married to Charles Overacker, the Recorder of Alameda County. The marriage didn't last long, but there is no record of either an annulment or a divorce, or of the date of Overacker's death.

Ella May was a pretty blonde, but her younger sister Katherine was a beauty. She went on the stage, very young, and soon came under the protection of William F. Cody, the fabulous "Buffalo Bill." It was undoubtedly his money that launched the young actress on a "world tour." By that time Ella May was separated from her husband, and to save appearances she went along as chaperone. The sisters were inseparable, and traveled everywhere together until 1897, when they had the first of their monumental quarrels, and Ella May returned alone to San Francisco.

The next year Katherine caught the eye of Howard Gould, and he defied his wealthy family to marry her. He was not disinherited, as he had feared, and the marriage lasted until 1909. Much of their time they spent on their palatial yacht, the *Niagara*, with such ill-fated guests as Wilhelm II of Germany and Nicholas II of Russia. Then the marriage crashed; Gould charged his wife with "undue association" not only with Buffalo Bill but also with the actor Dustin Farnum, and there was a court hearing that made scare headlines in all the papers. Katherine won exoneration and a legal separation, with $36,000 a year maintenance; the couple were never divorced. Perhaps the ordeal she had undergone turned her heart wistfully toward the sister she had loved so warmly; anyway, she and Ella May finally made up their quarrel.

Ella May meanwhile had been pursuing a very different career. The Dayans were Congregationalists, and Ella May had become a very devout one. Under church auspices she opened a mission kindergarten for Chinese children,

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which she called "The Little House of Gold." Her whole life was given to these children and their families. The Chinese loved her: they called her "the Christ Angel of Chinatown."

This was the old Chinatown of "before the the fire," a mysterious, dangerous place of gambling and opium and slave-prostitutes and tong wars. Its residents were just beginning to emerge from the fear and hatred that had been their early lot in California — except for the wealthy households who swore by some faithful Chinese servant.

And it was this Chinatown that fell in ruins and burned to ashes in April of 1906. "The Little House of Gold" went with the rest. Katherine Gould was in Europe at this time; she cabled money to her mother, then living in Palo Alto, but she did not even inquire whether her sister had survived. It was to be several years yet before their reconciliation.

The refugees from ruined Chinatown were settled in tents in the grounds of the Presidio, the Army headquarters where San Francisco had its beginning in 1776. Ella May, penniless, was given one of these tents. On its canvas walls she pinned a newspaper picture of her sister, and a crucifix. Though she had not yet left the Congregational Church, she was becoming increasingly attracted toward Roman Catholicism.

When rehabilitation started after the earthquake and fire, somebody in authority remembered Ella May Clemmons's interest in and friendship for the Chinese, and she was put in charge of their relief. She arranged for food, clothing, and housing for the swarms of homeless refugees. One of those who came to her tent for help was a man of about her own age, unusually tall for a Chinese, named Wong Sun Yue.

Gradually the devastated city began to be rebuilt, and a new Chinatown arose on the ashes of the old. Ella May moved back to it, though she did not reopen the kindergarten.

A few months later, she married Wong Sun Yue by Oriental rites, in a joss house. There was a Methodist ceremony later.

Legally, it may be doubted (even if Ella May herself was free from Overacker) whether the marriage existed by American law: for Wong already had a wife and children in China.

Ten years later, when it was over, Ella May contended that it had been a marriage "in name only." She said that Wong had been an opium addict, and that she had married him only to care for him and cure him. "I put my soul in pawn with God, to be given back to me when my mission was accomplished," she said. "There never were any marital relations."

But nobody would have believed that who knew them for the ten years they conducted a curio shop and tea room on Grant Avenue, the main business street of Chinatown;

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Ella May was obviously deeply in love with her husband. Moreover, there played around the shop, in later years, a little boy and girl who were indubitably half-white. Later she said they were adopted, but she never made any such claim then.

Katherine Gould's feelings when she learned she had a Chinese brother-in-law may be imagined. The reconciliation went through, but even after it she set herself unceasingly to break up the marriage. And even their mother, who seems to have been complacent about almost everything her unconventional daughters did, was outraged by this; she did not forgive Ella May until she lay on her own deathbed in 1911.

But Ella May was happy. She was proud of her husband and proud of their business. She had cards printed advertising it, with a picture of them both (she as well as he in full Chinese costume, which she usually wore from this time on), calling the proprietors with a curious lack of both accuracy and delicacy, "Mr. and Mrs. Wong Sun Yue Clemens — Mrs. Howard Gould's Sister." (This spelling of her father's name, which he always spelled Clemmons, gave rise to a rumor that she was the niece of Mark Twain; there was actually no relationship.)

Though Ella May had given up her kindergarten, she was still keenly interested in children and their education, and now she became an ardent disciple of the Montessori Method. About 1910, she and her sister were reconciled, and in 1916 she won Katherine's financial support for a scheme she had evolved — to go to China with Wong and open a Montessori School there. Mrs. Gould's co-operation has been called a deep-laid plot to separate Ella May from her Chinese husband; it was probably nothing of the sort, though of course Katherine was pleased when that was the eventual result.

The three of them sailed for China, together with two Chinese girl protégées. They made no arrangements for return, and apparently the Wongs at least planned to live there permanently. In Peking (now Peiping), with the Gould money, they established a school which they called "The House of Childhood."

But it lasted only a few months. Katharine and Ella May quarreled again, and Katherine withdrew her support. Without that, the school soon collapsed. Then the two girls they had brought with them both fell ill with smallpox. Ella May nursed them back to health, and when they had recovered she announced that she was returning with them to San Francisco.

Wong stayed behind, and went back to his Chinese wife and children. Ella May never saw or heard from him again. She put the best face on it she could. "Our protégées were being marked down for rich merchants to make slaves of," she

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said, "so I brought them with me and gave him back to his Chinese wife." But the course of her future life showed that it was a fundamental blow.

Once more Ella May became "the Christ Angel of Chinatown." She spent herself in service to its inhabitants. At last she formally joined the Roman Catholic Church, and became active in the charitable work of Old St. Mary's — which, though not a Chinese church and though it was once the Cathedral and is now conducted by the Paulist Fathers, is situated in the heart of Chinatown and has a thriving Chinese Mission. She had always been devout; now she became fanatically pious. She wore a huge crucifix around her neck, over her Oriental clothes; she wrote out prayers and pressed them on her acquaintances.

She opened another curio shop and tea room, a few blocks from the one she and Wong had owned, and ran it by herself for ten years. Occasionally she worked as a waitress in Chinese restaurants, and it was at this time that sometimes she sold papers on the streets. She became increasingly eccentric, a well-known figure whom San Franciscans pointed out to tourists. But she was never in the least insane. She ran her store competently, and she was a valued aide in Old St. Mary's Chinese Catholic Mission. She had grown very heavy, her curly blond hair had grayed, but she still had her harmless vanities. She had her hair cut and waved regularly, and she was proud of her beautifully manicured hands. She also grew coy about her age, and frequently took ten or fifteen years off it.

But as time went on her health began to fail. She had long been a mark for every swindler and confidence man, and now she began to run around after medical quacks and healers. Probably she already had uremic poisoning, for her sight began to fail. Nobody and nothing helped her, but each new failure only sent her to another charlatan. The one kind of help she never sought was that of an orthodox medical practitioner.

In 1928 — nobody knows how she heard of him — she went to the office of "Dr." Hjalmar Groneman.

Ella May became almost literally Groneman's slave. "Dr. Groneman is next to God," she told people who tried to rescue her. She gave him every cent above her bare living, and after she received her inheritance from her sister that amounted to considerable sums. It is known that once she gave him $5000 outright to bring his yacht to San Francisco from Seattle. Every day she cooked dietary meals for Groneman's patients, and dragged her heavy, sick body from place to place to deliver them. She had no time for anything else; her apartment, with its beautiful Chinese furnishings and the incongruous anatomical charts on the walls, became a mess of filth and disorder.

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She became practically a recluse except for her association with Groneman; old friends were forbidden ever to call on her again because "the doctor" had told her their influence on her was bad. She knew of Charlotte Enberg's existence, though she never knew the young woman was Groneman's mistress; once she found Charlotte ensconced in Groneman's yacht and quarreled with her jealously. If she had not been beyond making any protest, she would never have consented to Miss Enberg as her "nurse."

Medically as in every other way she followed Groneman's commands implicitly. For a long time she was allowed no liquids at all; she suffered horribly, but she obeyed. Then abruptly he put her on an all-liquid diet, and ordered her to swim every day and to walk five miles daily — an old woman weighing nearly 200 pounds and only a few months from her death!

This was too much for her failing strength, and she collapsed completely. Her landlady sent for a doctor, but Ella May refused to see him. She also refused to pay him for the visit he made, saying that Dr. Groneman was taking care of all her money.

Groneman must have been frightened by the near-escape of his gold mine. He issued a new ukase: Ella May was to become a prisoner in her own apartment. She never left it again until she was carried from it. She told one of the few friends still allowed to visit her that she was going away — "I may go to Paris to study medicine. Wherever it is, I can't give you any address; I am going too far away."

She notified the post office to forward her mail to Groneman's office. When anxious friends telephoned him, he said she had cancer, and was in a sanitarium in Palo Alto. He would forward mail to her, but she could not see anyone at all.

He kept this deception up from the summer of 1935 until early in 1936, four months after Ella May had died.

Ella May Clemmons might have been forgotten forever in her neglected grave, and Hjalmar Groneman might have lived long safe years on the comfortable proceeds of his strenuously earned legacy, had it not been for an enterprising reporter on the *News*, the Scripps-Howard paper in San Francisco.

Something fishy in the routine reports on the death of a woman who had been for a long time a locally public figure caught his attention — or was called to his attention by suspicious friends of the dead woman. He began to dig into the mass of evasions and contradictions, and the more he investigated the worse it grew. In January 1936 the newspaper broke the story.

Bit by bit the whole elaborate plot came to light. The grand jury subpoenaed both Groneman and Miss Enberg as witnesses.

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The jury got as little out of the healer and his mistress as the two could help. Only the threat of a contempt charge made Charlotte Enberg talk at all. Groneman acknowledged only what had already been proved by outside evidence. Cynically he brazened the whole thing out. His attitude was that this was his private affair and that the grand jury had a nerve to question him about it.

No, he hadn't called "another" doctor until the very end, he said, or had Ella May sent to a hospital, because he was her physician and he didn't consider another one necessary. His diagnosis had been cancer of the gall bladder, though no X-rays had ever been taken. Yes, he had sold her furniture and her jewelry — because "she was my wife and I was settling her estate." True, for several years she had given him appreciable sums of money — because "I never charged her for my services." He had married her simply "because she wanted it." Of course he wasn't in love with her — how silly could the grand jury get?

In February Groneman was indicted on charges of manslaughter and criminal negligence. Miss Enberg missed an indictment for manslaughter and conspiracy by one vote.

The two of them immediately took out an application for a marriage license. Groneman went out of his way to remark that he didn't love Charlotte either, but was willing to marry her because the revelations to the grand jury had damaged her reputation.

According to California law at that time, three days had to elapse between the license and the wedding. But there was no possibility of holding a trial within three days, and this action by Groneman was a serious blow to the prosecution, since a wife could not testify against her husband. Then, the day before the marriage could have occurred, Groneman changed his mind. Now he announced that they would not be married until after his trial, so that nobody could say he had tried to stifle her testimony. The prosecution drew a sigh of relief. It should have known better.

Groneman pleaded not guilty before Superior Judge Frank T. Deasy, with State Senator Walter McGovern as his attorney, and was released on $1000 bail. For some reason that has not been explained, he was not fingerprinted.

Before the trial date could be set, Charlotte Enberg disappeared. She has never been seen or heard of again. An intensive search failed to find any trace of her. She may still be alive somewhere, under another name, but if so, nobody knows except Hjalmar Groneman — if he too is still living. Undoubtedly he arranged for her disappearance.

A move to have Ella May Clemmons exhumed and autopsied was dropped without explanation.

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The months dragged on until December 1936. Miss Enberg was still missing, with no hint of her whereabouts. Without her testimony there was no case; any other evidence would be minor in character, or pure hearsay.

And so before the end of the year the case was dismissed. Nobody had seemed very eager to have Groneman convicted.

Groneman had already closed his office and ceased to practise. The will had been probated and it was perfectly valid. Even if the later will had been found, it would probably have made no difference; it too would have left everything to him.

After the dismissal he just quietly dropped from sight. Perhaps he rejoined Charlotte — somewhere, perhaps not.

Six years later, in the midst of World War II, came the last authentic news of Hjalmar Groneman.

An investigation was being made in connection with the assessment on Groneman's yacht, the *Rendezvous* — that same yacht for which Ella May Clemmons had paid $5000 to bring it down from Seattle.

Through devious sources it was learned that Groneman had gone to Tibet — which seems unlikely enough on the face of it, but then he had always had a way of managing the impossible. What is certain is that in 1941 he wrote to a woman in San Francisco who had previously acted as his business agent, and asked her to sail the yacht to Singapore. She refused.

Everybody knows what happened to Singapore. Maybe Groneman survived, maybe he didn't. He was rumored later to be driving a truck on the Burma Road. He was never listed as a Japanese prisoner.

Of course he too may have changed his name. He may yet turn up again, somewhere and somehow; he is the kind of person whose stories often have sequels.

It does not matter any more to the pathetic creature, dead these twenty years and more, who once was the Christ Angel of Chinatown.

Solution to Mystery Puzzle on page 100

The Inspector reasoned that Grayson could not be involved, since he was at the far end of the room. Alan could have poisoned the drink while he was wiping the tray, but he could not control who got what drink. If Dave had poisoned a drink before Alan turned the tray, he would have had no way of telling which drink contained the poison; and he had no opportunity to poison a drink after the tray was turned. He could, however, control who got the poisoned drink, as he passed the tray. Since no one person could have poisoned Dugan, it must have been two persons — Alan and Dave, who, it turned out, were working in collusion. Alan, of course, indicated to Dave which drink was poisoned, by wiping around it last.

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Greed, hate and a woman's jealousy — these are as much a part of the story of the kidnaping of Dr. Walter Linse as the political intrigues that motivated the brutal crime. For working with the high-powered communist officials were a group of ordinary criminals — men who sold their deadly services to the highest bidder; and a woman who wanted revenge on her unfaithful lover . . .

JOURNEY INTO OBLIVION

by Kurt Singer

DR. WALTER LINSE WAS AN ORDINARY middle-class citizen who happened to live in one of Europe's greatest storm centers, West Berlin. He was a rather mild, youngish man who liked bright ties and smart suits, but he led a sober sort of life. His habits were regular: a dweller in suburbia, he took the morning bus to work and came home in time for dinner. His work, however, was rather on the adventurous side. He was a lawyer and the most prominent member of the Investigating Committee of Free Jurists in Western Germany which, by patient probing, knew more about Communist espionage and propaganda in Western Germany than perhaps any other organization in the country. It never occurred to Dr. Walter Linse that his job, which he carried out conscientiously and ably, made him liable to the gravest dangers.

Really, Dr. Linse never had a chance. He was a quiet fellow, a bit of a bureaucrat at heart, and had avoided physical combat all his life. Perhaps he should have known how to defend himself. Certainly he could have used a smattering of judo on the morning of July 8th, 1952, when something happened which was to shatter his ordered existence.

Linse had just left his pleasant home, as he did every morning at this time to catch the bus from suburban Lichterfelde to the center of Berlin. As he walked along the street he was stopped by a young man in an open-necked sports shirt — a rather husky fellow — who inquired the time of him. Later on it was shown that the young man had reckoned on Dr. Linse's reaching for a pocket-watch, but Linse glanced quickly at his wrist-watch and told the stranger that it was seven-twenty.

"May I trouble you for a light?" the stranger then asked Dr. Linse.

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This time Linse had to reach into his pocket and it was the moment his assailant had waited for. He seized Linse by the shoulder, knocked him completely off balance and locked an arm around his neck. Taken by surprise, Linse managed to put up some resistance. He almost struggled free, but in the scuffle his spectacles were knocked off and this as much as anything else rendered him helpless. Near-sighted as he was, he failed to see that a taxi had drawn up by the curb. A second man jumped out of it, clouted Linse with a blackjack and got him partly into the cab. The struggle continued with Linse's legs threshing outside the cab. Finally one of the two men (a third accomplice was driving the cab) settled the matter by drawing a gun and shooting Linse in the thigh. Bleeding and weeping with pain, he was no longer able to resist and was dragged into the cab. The door was slammed and the taxi raced towards the boundary line between West Berlin and the Soviet Zone of East Germany.

Although few people were about, the kidnaping was witnessed by at least two persons. A woman who saw what was happening screamed for help while the driver of a small milk truck, who was making his deliveries a few doors down the street, tried chasing the taxi. When the kidnapers realized they were being followed one of them began firing at the pursuing truck. One bullet went through a headlight, another into the fender, while a third struck the right front tire. Even without this discouragement, the heavy truck would soon have been outdistanced by the speeding cab, which carried a West Berlin license plate.

The car reached the Communist check point without cutting its speed. The cab must have been expected, because the Russian police rushed out and hurriedly raised the barrier. The car shot on towards its destination — it was now safe from pursuit.

The foregoing details are important, because later they established the fact that the official Soviet Secret Police had a hand in the outrage. The entire plot must have been carefully worked out by General Wilhelm Zaisser, chief of the East German Secret Service, together with Ernst Wollweber, mastermind of the Soviet Secret Service and co-ordinator between the M.V.D. in Moscow and the Soviet German Secret Service of the so-called German Democratic Republic.

The news of the brutal kidnaping of Dr. Linse shocked West Germany. Official protest followed official protest. American diplomats and authorities in Berlin made inquiries of the Russians and the German Communists, but the Eastern authorities disclaimed any knowledge of the snatch. "We know nothing," was their invariable response.

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However, the Communist periodical *New Justice* revealed how little reliance could be placed on the protestations of innocence by publishing an article on Dr. Linse. This agent had finally fallen into the hands of the people and the people's court, the article declared. He would now have to answer for his crimes against the Democratic People's Republic of East Germany, and he would not be let off easily, etc., etc. This article certainly embarrassed the Communists. Somebody had blundered and to retrieve the situation copies of the magazine were recalled, but not all of them found their way back.

There was not much the West Germans could do. They were indignant and dismayed, but outside of offering a reward of 10,000 marks (approximately $1200) no other step was possible. It was hoped that the unusually high reward might secure results from the Communist camp. Meanwhile, hundreds of suspicious characters were rounded up and grilled. Very little information, however, could be obtained.

It was four months before the West German police received their first real clue. It was a graying November morning that a certain "Sonny" Brüggemann visited police headquarters. He had a hefty dossier and this was the first time he had ever visited the police without an escort of detectives. He asked to see the officer who was handling the Dr. Linse kidnaping case.

He was immediately referred to the department head, and then shown into the offices of a special agent, Paul Wardetzki. Agent Wardetzki turned out to be an old acquaintance of the petty thief—he had handled several cases in which Sonny had been involved.

Nervously Sonny sat down in the proffered chair opposite the special agent. "Yes, sir," Sonny mumbled, "I have a few things to tell you which you might find useful. They say there is a reward out for ten thousand marks for any information which might lead to the solution of the Linse case."

The special agent retained his outward calm. He had always felt that there was a direct link between the Communist Secret Service and the criminal underworld in Berlin. He was sure that the Linse kidnaping was an example of such "co-operation."

"Yes, it's true that we have posted such a reward," he said. "That is if the information will lead to the arrest and conviction of one or several persons."

The agent's reassurance loosened Sonny's tongue. "The reason I came here is not just because of the money, although it would be very useful to me, as you are no doubt aware. No, the real reason is that it was a diabolical business and I just have to talk. I don't have to tell you about my record, but there's one thing I've never been mixed up with and that's politics."

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Sonny was about twenty-nine years old, and he had probably never done an honest day's work in his life. Still, he was not the brutal type. Like many confirmed crooks, he was irresponsible, a happy-go-lucky character who wanted to make money fast and without too much effort. But he was not a murderer.

The agent looked more closely into Sonny's face. It was a thin, rather sharp-featured face with deep-set eyes and he certainly looked as if he had not been eating too regularly of late. His clothes were threadbare and his shirt hadn't seen a washtub for some time.

But now that he was called upon to talk Sonny pursed his lips and remained silent. It had taken nerve to come to police headquarters, and now his courage had all but evaporated. "Who will protect me? If the Russians find out who squealed, I'm a dead duck."

Herr Wardetzki guaranteed him the maximum of police protection, and Sonny screwed up his courage and blurted out a name. "Knobloch! Yes, Kurt Knobloch is the fellow you want. He's the one who organized the kidnaping. You might as well know that he's engaged to my sister. I never liked the idea from the first. But what could I do about it? There were actually four men who kidnaped Doctor Linse, and Kurt Knobloch was one of them."

The special agent said quietly: "How do you know all about it?"

"Oh," said Brüggemann evasively, "it just happens that it was so. I had a lot of bad luck last year and I remember getting out of the clink at a time when Knobloch had a lot of money, more money than I'd ever seen. He was buying my sister all kinds of things, dresses and real jewelry and nylons and shoes, and they often went away together for a week-end. He even stayed at our house. My mother didn't like it, but he seemed well off, so what could anyone do? Now I just happened to notice when he got up early in the morning, that there was a gun lying on the bedside table in my sister's room. So I asked him why he carried a gun and whether there was any connection between it and the money he was able to throw about. He explained, cool as you please, that he'd run into a good thing in the food line. It was coffee and tea and cocoa and that kind of stuff.

" 'Don't give me that stuff,' I answered. 'Who do you think you're bluffing? I wasn't born yesterday, and the black market isn't big business any more.' Well, I worked on him, kept on about it, you know, and then one day we went out and had a few drinks and his tongue loosened so he told me more about it. He admitted that he had been one of the four men who worked on the Linse job and he had been paid plenty for it by the East German Communist Secret Service. He mentioned all kinds of names. A man by

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the name of Wilhelm Zaisser and another named Ernst Wollweber were his bosses."

The more he listened to Brüggemann's story the more Wardetzki became convinced that he was hearing the truth, but what troubled him was that Knobloch was no longer in Berlin or even West Germany. After the kidnaping he had been removed by the East German police and sent to Leipzig for safe keeping. Wardetzki wanted Knobloch badly but he was out of reach. All this developed a few days later, when the agent knew for a fact that Sonny Brüggemann's story was true.

He had Sonny called back to the police station and put the problem to him. How were they going to get hold of Knobloch? The reward was offered for information "leading to arrest." They had to get hold of Knobloch or the reward was out. "No conviction, no reward. It's up to you. Maybe you can use your head for us this time. A fellow like you ought to be able to hit on something."

From that moment the West Berlin police and the Allied Secret Services, to whom the story had been passed on, had to take a back seat. They could do nothing but wait while Sonny, the petty thief, put his imagination to work to bring his "brother-in-law" back into the Western Zone of Germany.

It was well into the New Year before anything new cropped up on the Linse case. It was another dreary morning when Sonny Brüggemann appeared at Berlin police headquarters. This time he had a letter with him. He showed it to Wardetzki and the agent's heart beat a little quicker when he saw it:

> "I can't stand it down here any longer. Leipzig is a ghastly town. I am going to get out of here some time next week. Don't pull the job you told me about until I get back. Two heads are better than one. We've worked together before, so don't leave me out of it now. I want to get my share of this too. Just wait, I'll be showing up soon. For old time's sake.
>
> Yours,
>
> Kurt."

The note left Paul Wardetzki elated. "What job is this your friend is referring to?" he asked slyly.

Sonny hemmed and hawed. He didn't know how to put it, he said. The main thing was to bring Knobloch over into the West, so he had invented a rather fantastic story. "Of course it's all phony," he apologized, "but I proposed a little operation we might pull off together."

Sonny had spotted an old metal dealer somewhere in the Western part of Berlin whose basement shop was right on the border between the East and West zones. The old man had evidently made a lot of money dealing in scrap iron and junk. A miserly type, he kept his money in a chest of drawers in his bedroom.

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Sonny's idea was to engineer a burglary. He was going to inform the police of the time the burglary was to take place. Both he and Knobloch were going to be nabbed and thrown into jail. It was then up to the Inspector, Sonny now said respectfully, whether he, Sonny, should be released secretly while Knobloch stayed in jail, or whether the two should remain in custody together, at least for a time. Whatever the Inspector thought would look best, Sonny said.

On the afternoon of March 9th, 1953, Sonny Brüggemann telephoned Special Agent Wardetzki. His message was short and to the point: the policeman was to be at the corner of Brunnen-Strasse and Demminer-Strasse at seven o'clock that same evening.

Wardetzki posted several plainclothesmen in doorways opposite the shop and he had every point covered. He personally took over at the corner closest to the shop. At seven o'clock Sonny Brüggemann appeared on the street. He spied Wardetzki and went up to him. There was a slight hitch in the plan, he said. Knobloch was still waiting at the border. He had his doubts about crossing over into the Western sector. He had sent Sonny to the border to size up the situation and see if everything was O.K.

Wardetzki, a seasoned investigator, sensed that Sonny was terribly scared. The police agent knew that he had to do some very fast talking. If he had any influence over Sonny, this was the time to use it. He told Sonny that he had never expected him to turn yellow. If money would help him, the police would see to it that there was a fat little bonus in addition to the original reward. Sonny could pack up his whole family, and leave Berlin for some place in West Germany, where he would have enough to start a new life.

Sonny seemed reassured, "Very well," he said, "I'll do it." He ambled off. The police waited at their posts. Twenty minutes went by and it looked as though Knobloch was not going to appear. Wardetzki was almost ready to call it off when he saw a man approaching on the opposite side of the street. At the same time a number of others came strolling from the other side of Demminer-Strasse. Comrade Knobloch wasn't coming before some of his cronies combed the area and assured him the robbery could be pulled off without danger. The police had to act quickly and Wardetzki saw a group of girls gathered round the window of a small florist's shop. They were laughing and talking together and the agent signaled to his men. They came out of their hiding places and joined him. The officer then went up to the group of girls. "We're the police," he said. "We want your co-operation for a few moments. We will just stand here beside you. Carry on as though

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we were some friends of yours. Just laugh and talk and act naturally." A few minutes later Brüggemann and Knobloch crossed the avenue towards them. They walked over on the other side of the street and entered the hallway of a squalid old lodging house. Wardetzki gave them a minute and a half. He then drew his gun and motioned to his men to follow. Crossing the street, he ducked through a small door which led to the back entrance of the courtyard. He saw the rear window of the cellar flat, and sure enough, there were Knobloch and his gang searching the room of the absent junk dealer.

Knobloch was wanted alive and he was safe unless he pulled a gun. Wardetzki nabbed him and pressed his gun against the kidnaper's ribs and grabbed him with his free hand to slip the cuffs on him. "Don't move or I'll shoot," he said, "and that goes for all of you. The place is surrounded; you'd better go quietly."

Knobloch nodded mutely and then said: "This is the end of me." Moving backwards at the point of Wardetzki's gun, he collapsed against the shabby wall of the room he had tried to rob.

Some little time later he was brought into the agent's office and told to take a chair.

First came the routine of establishing his identity. He said his name was Kurt Müller, but soon admitted that he was Kurt Knobloch and had taken part in the kidnaping of Dr. Linse. He cried like a child when he was shown a picture of Dr. Linse.

Knobloch was only twenty-two, the product of a boys' reformatory, and he had already served four sentences for burglary. He was not bad-looking. The reform school had trained him in carpentry, and he might have become an honest workman if conditions in war-torn Berlin had not turned him, as it had many others, into a criminal.

Knobloch's story showed that there was a direct link between the Communists and the underworld. It began in the spring of 1952, on his release from an East Berlin prison after serving a sentence of six months for attempted robbery. He came out convinced that he was cured once and for all of any desire for a criminal career. But for all his determination to keep out of jail he couldn't find a job and the weeks went by and with them the hope of ever securing work. One night he was sitting in his favorite café when he was approached by a man whom he'd known in jail with a business proposition — "Shipping and freight" he called it.

It sounded very good to Kurt Knobloch. He needed money badly. He was finally introduced to a tall and husky individual named Paul. He never learned his second name. Paul was a man who got down to business. He had come to the inter-

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view equipped with some kind of paper, a "dossier" he called it. It turned out to be a short résumé of the career of Kurt Knobloch, and contained evidence of a burglary which Knobloch had committed in 1947. The case was quite simple. Knobloch would be arrested immediately, would stand trial and probably be sentenced to five years in an East German jail. However, as Paul knew, Knobloch was a good boy and to be trusted. This police file could be tossed into the fire — the whole thing could be forgotten. But of course Kurt would have to do something.

"What do I have to do?" Knobloch asked.

"You move freight."

"What sort of freight?" Knobloch wanted to know.

"You'll find out in good time. Don't ask too many questions now. Which do you want, jail or a good job? Make up your mind and make it up fast; I can't waste any more of my time."

Of course Knobloch accepted Paul's offer.

Paul explained that one of his friends, a man called Harry Bennewitz, would be calling on him and would tell him what to do. Knobloch did not know what was expected of him, but a little questioning in the right places revealed that this new outfit was the S.S.B., the East German Secret Police. His employer, Paul, was the field man for the Communist Secret Service.

On the first day of July, Harry Bennewitz, also a professional thief, visited Knobloch in his apartment. He told him that the first assignment had come through and it would be for the very next day. Sure enough, on the following afternoon Knobloch was picked up by a gray sedan in which Paul, Bennewitz and a newcomer called Herbert Krüger were the passengers. The men drove to a cheap restaurant somewhere in the center of East Berlin. Here they met a fifth member of the group, who identified himself as Siegfried Benter. Then the car, with the five men, went to an apartment in Karlshorst. Paul spent the evening with the bunch and did some heavy drinking. The object of the evening's party was to make sure that Knobloch did not talk to anybody. Later on, all five men staggered up the stairs of a cheap hotel. Knobloch shared a room with Bennewitz. Filled up on beer, he fell asleep immediately and asked no questions.

He was wakened early on the morning of July 3rd. Bennewitz, Knobloch, Benter and Krüger piled into the gray Opel and drove to West Berlin. Their destination was the home of Dr. Linse. It was not until then, according to Knobloch's confession, that he was informed what sort of freight he was supposed to move.

However, the attempt on July 3rd didn't materialize for, although it was early, too many people were

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about when Linse appeared. The gang drove back to Karlshorst.

The Communists were displeased over the failure and decided that Benter wasn't the right man for the job. He was replaced by a new man whose name was Kurt Borchardt, a professional wrestler and boxing champion with a criminal record far longer than any of the others. He was the one who on the fateful morning of July 8th accosted and overpowered Dr. Linse.

In the meantime it was decided to fit the car with West Berlin license plates and the kidnapers were provided with four automatic guns, a bottle of ether and a roll of cotton.

According to Knobloch's confession, Kurt Borchardt was entirely responsible for nabbing Linse and dragging him into the car. It was Knobloch who hit him with the blackjack and Krüger who drove the car. Bennewitz, the cruelest among them, was responsible for shooting Linse. Knobloch admitted that he had been paid the equivalent of $170 for his part in the affair. It was nice having money in his pocket, and for a while he kept the secret. But he couldn't help bragging about it and eventually he was sent to Leipzig, where a hotel room had been reserved for him. He was given false identity papers, so that he became Kurt Müller, and he was promised 700 East marks a month. It was an allowance designed to keep him out of mischief, and to be regarded as wages. Knobloch was supposed to work for his living.

To ensure that he would remain satisfied, the East German Secret Service provided him with a girl friend. Her name was Helga Otto and she was told to keep Kurt Müller happy. The arrangement was highly successful; it wasn't long before the two moved into the same apartment. A few months later Helga Otto was expecting a child by her lover. Somehow Sonny Brüggemann's sister got to know of the circumstances under which Knobloch was living and the girl swore she would get even with him.

Living together on such intimate terms, Knobloch soon told his new mistress, Helga, about his participation in the Linse kidnaping. He couldn't get the thing out of his mind. He began to have crying fits and nightmares. To make things worse, the Communist Secret Police decided that Knobloch wasn't worth the money they were spending on him, and cut off the allowance. So Helga skipped out one afternoon and went back to Berlin.

This left Knobloch in a very bad way. His nerve was gone and he couldn't stand living alone. It was at this point that he wrote to his old pal, Sonny, and indicated that he was ready to come back.

Sonny Brüggemann didn't make out too well either, even though he had been so co-operative with the Berlin police. Patience was definitely not among his virtues, and when the

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reward failed to come through immediately, he became restive and stole a bicycle. This made the seventeenth bicycle Brüggemann had stolen, and he was sentenced to six months.

As for Dr. Walter Linse, the unfortunate victim of the kidnaping, he has vanished into oblivion. All the police could learn was that he was taken to an S.S.B. prison in East Berlin. The Allied Secret Services later found out through their counter-espionage that Linse had been moved to a Russian M.V.D. prison in Karlshorst, and later to a concentration camp in Hohenschönhausen. It is believed that he is no longer alive. He was kidnaped because he was identified as one of the most important counter-espionage agents in Western Germany. His work was sufficiently important for the enemy to make this desperate effort to put an end to it. But there is an ironical twist to the tragic story of Dr. Linse and it is that this modest, unassuming man, before becoming the victim of a savage fate, left his house in such good order that nothing was really achieved by his kidnaping. His work suffered no interruption from the moment he stepped into oblivion.

PET PEEVES[1]

Recently Disruptive to Domestic Peace

A Detroit man suing for divorce complained in court that his wife gave him dry peanut butter sandwiches for lunch, while her dog ate club steak.

In Coral Gables, Fla., a husband sued for divorce when his wife insisted on keeping eight pet parrots to which she knew he was allergic.

A Michigan man sought a divorce because his wife was raising a crocodile in the bathtub.

An Oakland, Calif., woman won a divorce when she testified that her husband not only refused to keep the house warm enough for her pet rat but criticized it for overeating.

A Wichita, Kan., man who worked nights was given a divorce after testifying that he was deprived of sleep by the thirty-six pet canaries and two dogs his wife insisted on keeping in their bedroom.

A Cincinnati woman won a divorce after she proved her charge that her husband brought home $500 worth of tropical fish when what they really needed was food.

In Cleveland a husband's refusal to pay for food and medical care for his wife's horse won her a divorce.

—Paul Steiner

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THIEVES IN THE NIGHT

by Thomas P. Ramirez

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE Wisconsin State Prison at Waupun was faced with a problem. Crews of prisoners, working on a clearing project some thirty miles from the prison, had to leave their tractors in the woods at night. When they returned in the morning they found the tractors stripped of tires, spark-plugs, tools, gas and oil. Nearby farmers were responsible, but the authorities had been unable to catch them in the act. When guards were posted, no damage was done. As soon as the guards were removed, the thieves returned.

One morning, as he surveyed the damage, the superintendent was approached by a prison inmate. "Let me handle it, sir," he said. "I'll stop this in a hurry."

"You know I can't leave you out here overnight."

"I know, sir. Just give me a couple of hours in the workshop. Then leave me alone here for a couple minutes tonight."

The next morning when the crew arrived, they discovered the tractors just as they had left them. Nothing had been taken, although tracks around the machines indicated that the nocturnal prowlers had revisited the scene.

"But, what did you do?" blurted the superintendent.

"Walk around the other side," said the convict with a proud smile. There, propped against a gas can, between the two tractors, was a crudely lettered sign:

HELP YOURSELF BUDDY!
I'M DOING FIVE YEARS FOR THE
SAME THING!!

The petty thievery was stopped cold.

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Her name was Cleopatra, and she was as beautiful an enchantress as the Queen who was her namesake. She managed, too, to rule her little world as ruthlessly: and if her hands were less bloody it was only for the lack of opportunity. Then, one day, clasped in her lover's arms, Cleo's dreams went up in the smoke of her fiery death. And she left the police to sift the bitter ashes for her killer . . .

CLEOPATRA OF PUGET SOUND

by Stewart H. Holbrook

THIRTY YEARS AGO THE SAWMILL city of Everett, on Puget Sound, had two well-defined districts. Bayside held the main business section and also the better residential streets. In Riverside lived several thousand mill workers and their families of many nationalities, together with their foreign-language churches, their fraternal halls, their neighborhood stores.

Not a few of these workers were Greeks. Other Greeks operated many of the small groceries, shoe-repair shops, cigar stands, and other such enterprises in Riverside. Among these places was the bakery of Pete and Cleopatra Karas, man and wife, both of whom were to play leading parts in a sort of modern Greek tragedy.

The tragedy in Riverside, which for good reasons became known as the Affair of Cleopatra, would have served Dreiser well for a novel, or O'Neill for the kind of play he favored. It was filled with the sinister overtones both writers liked, and with the mixed and hideous motives they displayed.

The opening scene of the Affair of Puget Sound's Cleopatra was commonplace enough. The time was July 1922. On the morning of the 26th, Mrs. Cleopatra Karas, twenty-four years old, darkly handsome and with a profile classically Greek, appeared at the Everett police station to report her husband, Pete, missing. He had left their bakery and home in Riverside the night before, driving a small truck. No, she did not know where he was going. She dabbed at her great dark eyes with a handkerchief. No, she had no idea of what could be detaining him.

Less than an hour later, George Chakos, younger brother of Mrs. Karas, came rushing into the police station to say he had found his missing brother-in-law's truck. It was in the brush just off the road to Mukilteo, a few miles out of town. No, he had seen no trace of the missing

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man; just the truck, "with raisins and things scattered all around."

Young Chakos hadn't time to leave the station when a phone call came to the police. A man named Jim Lavitt was calling from a farmhouse on the Mukilteo road. "I found a dead man and a truck in the brush near here."

Taking the coroner along, Captain Bill Craw headed out the Mukilteo road. Jim Lavitt was waiting near the dead man, who turned out to be Pete Karas. Nearby was Pete's truck. Pete had been thoroughly shot. There were five .32 caliber bullets in his body. All around the truck were scattered raisins and packages of yeast. In the truck, undisturbed, were several sacks of sugar.

The thing looked obvious enough. All over the United States men were being found dead under similar circumstances as moonshiners and bootleggers fought for new business or for control of disputed markets. Raisins, yeast, sugar, and a dead man. They made a pattern of crime in the 1920's. And Pete Karas was a baker, a business that called for large quantities of the things that went into the making of moonshine. It was likely, Captain Craw thought, that Pete had been supplying the operators of stills in the wooded region around Mukilteo.

On Sunday, July 30, Everett's Greek colony turned out for the funeral of Pete Karas, who was laid away with the elaborate rites of the Orthodox Church, while the pretty widow wept in her weeds. On Monday, life in Riverside resumed its way. The murder of Cleopatra's husband was quickly forgotten, at least by all except a few friends and relatives. As for Bayside, the killing was just another casualty of the booming business of making and selling moonshine. Virtually all memory of it had been erased by March 17 of the following year.

At about two o'clock that morning, Nick Wilson, night-man at the Healy garage in Riverside, was working on a stubborn car. Across the street was the dark bakery of Widow Cleopatra Karas. Suddenly it seemed to glow inside, then it lighted, flared. Wilson called the fire department. Though the run was made quickly, the bakery and the Karas living quarters in the rear were a mass of flames before the hoses could come into play. Fireman Charles Blunt beat his way through a blazing door of the living quarters and presently brought out the bodies of two small children. Another fireman turned his attention to a small shack, standing in the alley, separate from the other buildings. The door of this hut finally opened to his pounding, and out came George Chakos, the young brother of Cleopatra, he who had reported finding the truck of Pete Karas but who had missed seeing the corpse near it. Now, as he came out of the shack in the alley, he appeared groggy. He did not seem to realize what was going on,

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or what had happened. In a moment more his mind began to act. "Did you get them out of there?" he asked firemen. They told him two children had been rescued and doctors were already working to revive them. "But Cleo, my sister," the young man cried, "and Gus? How about them?"

When the flames were at last laid, firemen found two bodies on a bed in the dwelling. One was that of Gus, brother of the late Pete Karas. The other was Cleopatra, naked except for a badly torn silk nightgown. Fire had not killed them. The coroner discovered they had been beaten to death.

The Affair of Cleopatra now numbered five victims. Pete Karas, his brother Gus, Cleopatra, and her two children, who had failed to respond to the respirator. Captain Bill Craw went with Fire Chief Taro to look through the remains of the bakery. The chief remarked the fire had obviously been an arson job. Some kind of oil had been used. Two fires had been set, one on the ground beneath the building, the other in the bedroom where Cleopatra and Gus were found. It had been a thorough and effective piece of work. Yet, there was no sign of an attempt to set fire to the detached shack from which groggy — or Captain Craw, wondered, *was* he groggy? — George Chakos had emerged.

Craw looked first in the shack. It contained a bed, a chair, and a kerosene lamp. Then he went carefully over the dwelling quarters. Robbery could not have been the motive. Here and there in various places he came across small caches of money that would easily have been found by any thief. He picked up a stick of stovewood that was bloodstained. More important, so it was to turn out, was a small badly charred trunk. This the officer took to the station. The contents, unharmed by fire or water, included clothing, trinkets, photographs, and letters of Cleopatra's. One of the pictures showed Cleo and Pete Karas on their wedding day. She was quite dazzling. Dark eyes looking, none too shyly, from the sweeping white veil; a certain assured stance, not bold, yet positive, in contrast to the rather apologetic appearance of Pete. The letters were in Greek. Craw gave them to a translator.

Craw next devoted himself to young George Chakos, Cleopatra's brother. He was not of any great help. He seemed to have no ideas as to who might have set the fires, and could offer no opinion about the killings, either of Pete Karas on the Mukilteo road, or of the four persons in the bakery dwelling. The police officer could not bring himself to believe Chakos could have slept throughout the din of the fire sirens, the roaring trucks, the flames, and the noisy work of the firemen. But the youth was stubborn on this point. Craw decided to hold him in jail for a while.

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After Chakos had remained in a cell for a couple of days, Craw questioned him again, and this time learned something of interest: Right after the murder of Pete Karas, the youth said, Pete's brother Gus had moved in to live with the Widow Cleopatra; and she asked her young brother, who had been living in the Karas bakery dwelling, to move into the detached shack in the rear of the bakery. The pretty widow's tears had dried quickly.

While Captain Craw was mulling over Gus's replacement of his dead brother in the widow's home, and possibly in her bed, still another character appeared in the tragedy through the agency of S. A. Bostwick, Everett attorney.

Soon after the bakery fire, Bostwick came to Captain Craw to say that Cleopatra Karas had been his client. Several months before her death, she and a restaurant man named George Dinas came to his office. Cleopatra asked the attorney to execute a note by which she loaned $300 to Dinas on a mortgage against his place of business, a small cafe in the logging town of Morton, some 200 miles south of Everett. Several weeks later, Cleopatra alone returned to Bostwick's office. She told the attorney that she was being threatened by Dinas with bodily harm unless she sent him more money. And a little later, sometime in December, Dinas called on Bostwick. He wanted the attorney to phone the woman and direct her to pay Dinas $50. It was due him, he said.

Bostwick phoned Cleopatra and related to her what Dinas had said. She replied she would pay him no more money, and hung up. Whereupon Dinas flew into a rage. "She got the money," he told Bostwick. "She got it and she'll give me money. But Gus, he's got Cleopatra. I fix Gus!" Dinas went away. That was during Christmas week of 1922. The bakery fire had followed in March.

Bostwick's information surely had some bearing on the complicated affairs of Cleopatra Karas, but just how and where did not seem clear to Captain Craw. If anything it only added to the puzzle. Dinas' angry remark implied jealousy on the part of this latest figure in the case. Craw thought it over. But how did it connect, if at all, with the murder of Pete Karas?

The translations of letters in Cleopatra's trunk were ready, and the police officer sat down to read them. The translator was no classic Jowett, fit to render Plato into superb English; yet he did manage to present in halting English a view of the desires and the plans of George Dinas. Sixty days after the body of Pete Karas was found, Dinas was writing the widow to send him, at once, the sum of $300. If she failed to do so, then "both you parties going be in jail. No joke. I lay everything if you don't."

Apparently George Dinas got no

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reply from Cleopatra. His next letter went to Gus Karas. It was dated in January 1923. "Learn for health," he began politely, "that I am well." Then he got down to the matter in hand. Dinas needed $50, and by God, Gus had better send it. Dinas reminded Gus that "the thousand was given to have your brother killed." (This of course referred to Pete Karas.) Dinas repeated once more that Gus must send him the $50, now, at once, by return mail. The letter closed with the phrase: "My last letter."

Captain Craw sent officers to arrest Dinas at Morton and bring him to Everett. There, in jail, he denied everything, even writing to Cleopatra or Gus. He said further that he was at home in Morton, 200 miles away, on the night the bakery burned. He could, he said, prove as much. Craw left Dinas and went to young Chakos, still in a cell. Chakos had remained sullen and uncommunicative. But when Craw informed him Dinas claimed to have not been in Everett at the time of the fire, Chakos seemed to rouse. His eyes snapped. "He was not in Morton," he said with some heat. "He was in our bakery the night it burned. I saw him." Repeated questions brought out the fact that on the night in question, Chakos heard Cleopatra and Dinas arguing "about something." Chakos had paid them no heed; did not know the subject of the argument, only that it was "pretty hot." Dinas had "hung around" the bakery until at least nine o'clock. The fire broke out a few hours later.

Although Craw naturally had come to believe that Dinas had had something to do with one or all of the murders, he was still troubled about the youth, George Chakos. He could not believe the lad had slept through the uproar; and he wondered why he had been so uncooperative in helping to clear up the mystery, or mysteries, in the affairs of his late sister.

Craw now went to Morton, and he got some unexpected help. Mrs. Virginia Manke, wife of C. J. Manke, who had been a partner with Dinas in the Morton cafe, said that Dinas had often spoken about Cleopatra Karas of Everett. "Dinas said," she told the police officer, "that Mrs. Karas once offered him $3000 to lure her husband, Pete, out into the woods and kill him. Dinas told me he had gone so far as to buy a gun, then got cold feet. Or, so he said."

Mrs. Manke went on to quote Dinas to the effect that Cleo had told him she herself would do the job of killing Pete right in the bakery, but was afraid "it would frighten the children." This remark strikes the perfect chord in the folklore of so many crimes in the United States. The cruel thug Jesse James was always kind to horses. The ax-woman, Lizzie Borden, doted on cats. The unspeakable Jesse Pomeroy, sadist extraordinary,

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loved his mother greatly. Cleopatra Karas did not wish to frighten her children while engaged in killing their father.

On his return from Morton to Everett, Captain Craw first had a long discussion with Dinas. Little came of it. Dinas denied having told Mrs. Manke any such thing; and, far from admitting any personal liking for the late Cleopatra, he insisted that he had known her and her husband only casually. "I never even shook hands with Mrs. Karas," he said.

The police officer now began to get some help from Everett's Greek colony. Ever since the bakery fire he had been making personal efforts to interest them in clearing up the crime. He had talked with grocers, shoe-repair men, priests, sawmill workers. He had used the greatest diplomacy to break down the almost automatic and united front that Riverside had always presented against the Law. And now, convinced at last they should help the cops, they were coming to Craw's office voluntarily.

From this one and that one, Craw pieced together early chapters in the lives of Cleopatra and Dinas. When Dinas first saw her, Cleo was in her early teens, unmarried, pretty, lively, intelligent. George Dinas fell hard. Cleo appeared to return the feeling. From men and women of her generation and social circle, Craw got a new and revealing picture of Cleopatra, the young belle of Riverside. He learned that she had often gone on evening boatrides on the Snohomish river with Dinas. They had attended the Everett roller skating rink. On at least one occasion, a friend had seen Cleo and Dinas emerge from the wooded section of suburban Beverley Park, her long black hair in disarray, the light of passion in her great dark eyes. It seemed to be the general opinion in Riverside that there had been intimacies.

Yet George Dinas meant business, too; he went to Cleo's parents to ask her hand in marriage. No, said Mr. Chakos, it could not be. In the traditional manner, he had already promised Cleo to the rising young businessman, Pete Karas, who was doing so well with his bakery. So, doubtless against her will, the prettiest Greek girl in Everett was married to Pete Karas, and three children were born of the union. (One of which survived the bakery fire because she was elsewhere on a visit.)

But no matter the marriage, or so the talk had it in Riverside, Mrs. Karas had continued to see a good deal, indeed too much, of George Dinas. There were times when Pete was away in Seattle on business for a whole afternoon. When that happened, Dinas was soon seen at the bakery. After half a dozen such occurrences, coincidence failed to excuse matters. Pete Karas, however, seemed to suspect nothing.

Dinas also was a businessman,

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though not a very good one. Some six months before Karas was murdered, Dinas had set up his restaurant in Morton. Perhaps it was then, with Dinas absent, that the roving eye of the insatiable Cleopatra had lighted on her husband's handsome brother Gus. Yet, even if it had, Dinas had remained on sufficiently good terms with her to hold conversations relative to bumping off her husband. And *was* Dinas the killer? Or was it the victim's brother Gus?

George Dinas was officially charged with the murders of Cleopatra Karas and Gus Karas. He was tried and found guilty. In defense, his attorney warned the jury that George Chakos, Cleo's brother, was the guilty party; that he had killed his sister "to protect her good name" from the gossip of living in sin with her brother-in-law; and had killed Gus for "debauching his sister." The jury paid no heed. Dinas was sent to the penitentiary for life.

Who lured Pete Karas to the dark woods of the Mukilteo road is something the law did not consider. Nor was Captain Craw ever able to make up his own mind about it. Not long before his death, in 1941, he told me he was glad that he never had to work on another such murder case. He held the Greeks to be wonderful people, even in their crimes, which they take good care, said he, shall be complicated beyond all understanding. He felt that only a Greek detective was really fit to work on any mystery involving the lives of two or more of that people. When a few years later, Captain Craw was made chief of the Everett detectives, his first act was to appoint an American of Greek descent to the plain clothes detail in Riverside.

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In this issue—**HANG FOR HER by FLOYD MAHANNAH**

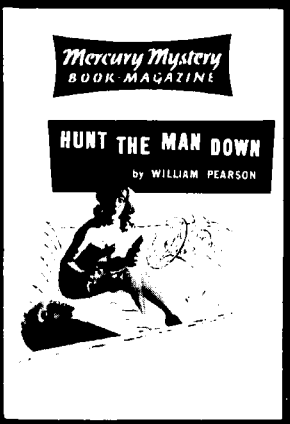
Ivy's beauty had gotten her a rich husband, and it earned her the friendship of a dangerous crook. But when she got involved in blackmail and murder she ran to Dex Nolan for help. Dex's love for Ivy trapped him into helping her evade the law, and before he knew it, both of them were frightened fugitives from a murder rap—fugitives who couldn't even trust each other . . .

Next month *— a thrilling issue, on newsstands March 27th, will feature* **HUNT THE MAN DOWN,** *a full-length original novel by* **WILLIAM PEARSON.** *Alive, Carol Malden's husband offered her poverty and old age; dead, he was worth $150,000. But when George's plane crashed, killing everyone on board, Carol found herself facing the greatest terror she had ever known . . .*

Plus:

KILLER ON THE RUN
by EDWARD D. RADIN
The gripping true story of a boy who was doomed to kill

THE MAN WHO BEAT THE INCOME TAX
by JAMES RUNNING
A true account of an amazing fraud



and other articles, fact-crime stories, and offbeat tales of the strange and exotic. **Why not get every exciting issue? Use the convenient coupon on page 128 to subscribe—TODAY!**

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